DEADPOOL & WOLVERINE

EXCLUSIVE! RYAN REYNOLDS AND HUGH JACKMAN RIP UP THE MCU RULEBOOK

TOTAL FILM

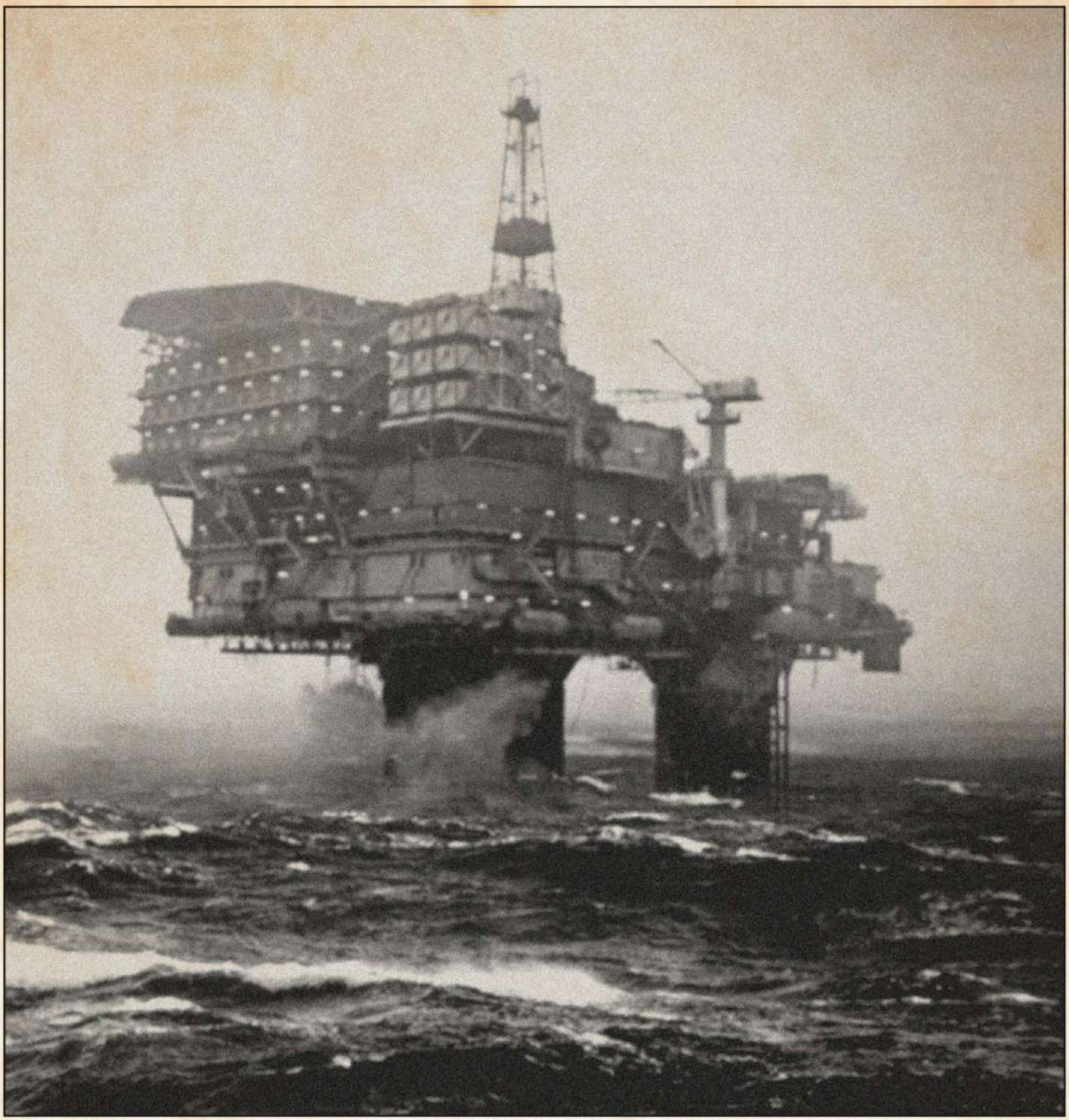
NATALIE PORTMAN
ON STAR WARS, MARVEL AND TACKLING TV

HORIZON
KEVIN COSTNER GETS BACK IN THE SADDLE

BORDERLANDS
ELI ROTH'S VIDEO-GAME NASTY

FUTURE

PLUS MAXXXINE MATT DAMON LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RINGS OF POWER S2
COBRA KAI S6 BLAIR WITCH AT 25 THE FILMS WE'LL *NEVER* WATCH AGAIN



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Welcome to

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THE SMARTER MOVIE MAGAZINE

This year's Marvel Cinematic Universe content might be limited, but if we're only going to get a single MCU film in 2024, what a film to be getting! *Deadpool & Wolverine* marks the team-up of two of the comic-book movieverse's most beloved figures, both on and off screen. And who better to shake up the MCU and tear it a new fourth wall than the Merc with the Mouth and a new, even angrier incarnation of Wolvie.

Ryan Reynolds and Hugh Jackman are notable for two of the most indelible comic-book performances of the modern era – one of them played no small part in kick-starting the superhero boom time we've been living through, and the other came along and turned it on its head. But they're also renowned as two of the hardest-working people in the biz, and two of the most fun to chat to. Leila Latif found that out when she interviewed them for our epic cover feature, which you'll no doubt be diving into shortly.

If you're looking for more cinematic chaos after that, we've also got Eli Roth talking about his video-game adap *Borderlands*, and Ti West and Mia Goth on returning to complete their slasher trilogy with *MaXXXine*. Or, for more old-school gravitas, Kevin Costner and his cast tell us about returning to the Old West with *Horizon*, an undertaking with a world-building ambition rarely seen in original movies these days. Plus, a career chat with Natalie Portman as she takes on her first major TV role, and a new look at the latest film from Matt Damon. Still not satiated? Then check out the *TF* team picking the films we'll never revisit (and not always for the reasons you think). So what are you waiting for? There's something for everyone to sink their adamantium claws into here.

Enjoy the issue!

Matt

MATT MAYTUM, EDITOR
@MATTMAYTUM

CALL SHEET
THIS ISSUE'S EXTRAS

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
LEILA LATIF
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I had so much fun talking to Ryan Reynolds and Hugh Jackman. I've loved them both since the 1990s. Who would have thought one day I'd get to talk to them about clowns, shame spirals and pegging?

NEWS EDITOR
LAUREN MILES
@LAUREN_M1LES

I asked *Umbrella Academy* star Tom Hopper about shooting BBC series *Merlin*. He joked about his character having so few lines: 'The Knights of the Round Table used to say that we're the best-paid extras in the business!'

ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR
EMILY MURRAY
@EMILYVMURRAY

It was great to dive into all things *Hit Man* with director Richard Linklater for the podcast, discussing everything from do movie stars still exist to bringing sex back to cinema. I could've easily spoken to him all day...

DEPUTY EDITOR
JORDAN FARLEY
@JORDANFARLEY

While the rest of the cast turned up in their civvies, Jedi Wookiee Kelnacca wore his robes and lightsaber to the London premiere of *The Acolyte*. Talk about method...

ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR
MOLLY EDWARDS
@MOLLYCAROLINE7

As a Star Wars geek, I loved chatting to Daisy Ridley on the *Total Film* podcast, and even got a *little* bit out of her on her Rey spin-off movie: 'There are lots of discoveries to be had...'

EDITOR-AT-LARGE
JAMIE GRAHAM
@JAMIE_GRAHAM9

Is it a coincidence that my Zoom meet with legendary soundman Walter Murch (*The Conversation*, *Apocalypse Now*) boasted the best audio I've ever had in an interview? I think not.

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EXCLUSIVE

TEASERS

THE WILD BUNCH

BORDERLANDS Eli Roth turns sci-fi world-builder for a gonzo video-game adaptation with the year's most bonkers cast.

Video-game adaptations have levelled up of late. *Arcane*, *The Last of Us* and *Fallout* all proved that pixel-powered source material doesn't have to mean an instant game over on screen. The latest game movie gunning for glory is *Borderlands*, the feature adaption of the Gearbox-developed space-shooter series that hails from an unlikely source – gore-lord Eli Roth.

'Obviously, horror is my passion, but I really, really love big, fun sci-fi,' Roth – the director behind fright-fests *Cabin Fever*, *Hostel* and *Thanksgiving* – tells *Teasers*. 'I wanted to make a big, fun, totally insane film – but something with the beauty and style of a film like *The Fifth Element*, or even *Barbarella*. It's world-building, which is something I've always wanted to do. If I was 12 years old and I went to see *Borderlands*, I'd think this was the greatest movie ever.'

The project began development in 2015, with an early draft of the script penned by *TLoU* co-creator Craig Mazin, then Roth signed up in 2020 after pitching an adaptation, not a 'recreation' of the game, which would necessarily deviate from the source material in some major ways, in service of a better film. 'I said, "I don't want [audiences] to be like, 'Oh, that was a good video-game movie.'" I want them to say, "That was a really fun science-fiction film, period."'

Set on the vibrant wasteland world of Pandora, *Borderlands* sees a ragtag crew – including outlaw Lilith (Cate Blanchett), mercenary Roland (Kevin Hart), scientist Tannis (Jamie Lee Curtis), masked muscle Krieg (Florian Munteanu) and wisecracking robot Claptrap (Jack Black) – reluctantly team up to find unstable pre-teen explosives expert Tiny Tina (Ariana Greenblatt),

Claptrap, voiced by Jack Black

the daughter of the villainous Atlas (Édgar Ramírez). Colourful chaos, naturally, ensues.

Shot in Budapest under tight COVID-19 restrictions (including an 8pm curfew) in spring 2021, Roth describes his on-set experience as 'like being a zookeeper… Everyone's a joker.' That included Blanchett, the first person Roth went to with the script after the pair worked together (alongside Black) on 2018's *The House with a Clock in its Walls*.

'Cate and I have a very similar taste in movies; she loves *The Evil Dead*,' Roth says with a chuckle. 'She really got the character. We thought of The Man with No Name, Dirty Harry, Ellen Ripley and Snake Plissken. We thought of great, fun, badass characters – and that's how I see Cate. I know everyone wants to see her waving the conductor stick, but I want her wielding a flamethrower!'

Hart plays similarly against type as tooled-up merc Roland, the straight man of the crew. 'The thing about Kevin is, he's never killed anyone in a movie before,' Roth notes. 'We talked about this being his transition. You think of Eddie Murphy going from *48 Hrs.* to *Beverly Hills Cop*, where suddenly he's a badass. And Will Smith going from *Fresh Prince* to *Bad Boys*. Kevin is an amazing fighter, and he's in sick shape.'

Claiming that 'everyone was down to go completely insane for the movie' – including recent Oscar winner Curtis, whose character is literally insane – Roth was particularly impressed by rising star Greenblatt, who plays fan-favourite character Tiny Tina like a bomb-tossing, bunny-eared cross between *Leon*'s Mathilda and Harley Quinn. 'She really is the heart of the movie,' says Roth. 'I said, "This is one of the best young actors I've ever seen." And, of course, after that, she does *Barbie*, and becomes as big a star as she should be.'

Roth also mixed it up with the actors on set, doubling for Claptrap when the static stand-in model for the all-digital character was required to move. 'I would squat down and act out the scenes, just so Cate and the cast would have someone to act with. It's me going, [adopts nasally, high-pitched voice] "I'm talking like Claptrap!"' recalls Roth, even though Black recorded his lines ahead of filming. 'Ariana loved it, but it would drive Kevin and everybody else crazy.'

The irreverent tone and cartoonish levels of gun-based hyper-violence in the games works because of a unifying, graphic cel-shaded art style. Roth always knew his film would need to be similarly vivid. 'I thought, "This doesn't have to be some flat, drab, dystopian universe. This could look insane and beautiful and wild. There could be beauty in the detritus,"' he says. 'I wanted something that was hyper-pop with lots of neon colours and pinks and fluorescents, where people are living on this trash planet but they're making the most of it.'

With its team of larger-than-life ne'er-do-wells-turned-heroes, space-based comic action and a trailer conspicuously cut to a pop banger, comparisons have inevitably been made to *Guardians of the Galaxy*. While Roth acknowledges 'there's going to be similarities no matter what you do, just because of the nature of the subject matter', he notes that 'I was very conscious of not remaking *Guardians*. [Audiences will] see the movie, and they'll see it's different.'

But like *Guardians*, *Borderlands* could be the start of something much bigger if audiences embrace this similarly idiosyncratic blockbuster – there are seven games, after all. Roth isn't necessarily done on Pandora either, on one important condition. 'I loved it, and I'm very proud of it, but it's years of your life. I definitely would do it again.' He pauses and grins. 'But I think I need to knock out a few horror films before I do.' **JORDAN FARLEY**

'I definitely would do it again – but I think I need to knock out a few horror films before I do'
ELI ROTH

Ear, ear: Ariana Greenblatt (left) as Tiny Tina

BORDERLANDS OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 9 AUGUST.

Jamie Lee Curtis (centre) as Dr. Patricia Tannis

LIONSGATE

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Kevin Hart gets to show off his action capabilities as Roland

The gang on their mission, including Lilith (Cate Blanchett) and Roland (Kevin Hart)

Horror maestro Eli Roth sidesteps into sci-fi caper fun

HOT RIGHT NOW

ANDREW SCOTT IS A PRIME SUSPECT...

'I feel like the work that I'm just interested in doing is more in the grey areas,' Andrew Scott told *GQ*, reflecting on a time in his career when he was mainly playing villains – first Jim Moriarty in the BBC's *Sherlock* and then C in James Bond movie *Spectre*. He's taken on more varied roles since then, from the Priest in Phoebe Waller-Bridge's *Fleabag* (a character that catapulted him to internet stardom even more than *Sherlock* already had) to a leading part in Andrew Haigh's deeply personal – and critically acclaimed – *All of Us Strangers*.

Now, he gets to play what's likely one of many murder suspects in Rian Johnson's third Knives Out movie, titled *Wake Up Dead Man: A Knives Out Mystery*. We know he's being joined by *Challengers*' Josh O'Connor, Cailee Spaeny and Glenn Close. As with the previous movies, the rest of the ensemble cast is equally accomplished, with Jeremy Renner, Kerry Washington and Daryl McCormack also recently announced. While we know nothing about Scott's role or plot details at present, the characters in the Knives Out films have always had big personalities.

Entering into a beloved franchise is just one more step up for an actor whose fame has grown for 15 years. He was acting before then, starting out on the stage in the early 90s, but was only really known in theatre-loving circles until that pivotal role in *Sherlock* in 2010. He quickly graduated to the status of Bond villain, before surprising everyone by becoming the 'Hot Priest' of their dreams. Scott's not stopped surprising us, entering the fantasy world of author Philip Pullman with *His Dark Materials* in 2019, playing the titular twisted con man in Netflix's *Ripley*, and putting on a one-man stage show with *Vanya*.

On the horizon, too, is a turn in *Back in Action*, the action-comedy flick that marks Cameron Diaz's return to the screen. Only time will tell if that role also allows Scott to break free from his early, villainous stereotype, but his upcoming work with Rian Johnson is certain to allow him to thrive in the grey areas. **LAUREN MILES**

BACK IN ACTION STREAMS ON NETFLIX FROM 15 NOVEMBER. WAKE UP DEAD MAN: A KNIVES OUT MYSTERY STREAMS ON NETFLIX IN 2025.

GETTY

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William Zabka, Ralph Macchio and Yuji Okumoto all return for the final season

SNAKES ON A PLANE

COBRA KAI S6 The final season sees the titular dojo jet off to the world championships. Spoilers for S1-5 ahead...

If there's one thing the past seasons of *The Karate Kid* sequel series *Cobra Kai* have taught us, it's that even when you've won a major battle, there's always another conflict just around the corner. The end of Season 5 saw Cobra Kai sensei Terry Silver (Thomas Ian Griffith) beaten by Ralph Macchio's Daniel LaRusso and sent to prison. But is this the last we've seen of him? And what's become of Martin Kove's original antagonist John Kreese?

'Just when you think you're done, you get pulled back in,' Macchio says, teasing the inevitable drama to come in the sixth – and final – season. It's a long time for a modern show to run, as the actor (who also serves as an executive producer and directed an episode of this season) points out: 'Nothing has six seasons any more, certainly in streaming, so it's very unique to have what will be 65 episodes.' There's a part of him, though, that never doubted that a sequel to *The Karate Kid* movies would be a success. 'There certainly were ebbs and flows, but the pop-culture impact of those films was always there.'

The karate soap opera, as Macchio calls it, has set up a finale that promises a showdown between the students of the three dojos – Daniel LaRusso's Miyagi-Do, Johnny Lawrence's (William Zabka) Eagle Fang and the titular Cobra Kai. When it comes to the fight choreography, Macchio says he's 'worked harder this year, and the results are better', while teasing a big fight sequence in the sixth episode. 'I just got word back from the stunt team and the producers that it's by far my best fight in the series.'

'Just when you think you're done, you get pulled back in'
RALPH MACCHIO

When children need teaching, Daniel LaRusso will be there

He equally wants the attention to be on the younger cast and their accomplishments, especially in a season that's pushed them physically further than before. 'With the young cast, and the big tournament levels and the international element of this show, it goes really big and global. The martial arts are like Cirque du Soleil meets Olympic karate.'

Cobra Kai may be coming to an end, but this isn't the last we've seen of Daniel LaRusso, as Macchio reveals that he's set to start shooting 2025's *The Karate Kid* the day after talking to *Teasers*. He elaborates that the movie is a new chapter featuring 'a boy from China who comes to New York with his mum looking for a fresh start, and he's confronted and needs to overcome obstacles'.

As for his own involvement, it seems that Daniel LaRusso just can't turn his back on a kid that needs to be taught some karate. 'He's drawn back in. Any time he can share Miyagi's legacy, that means something to him.'

LAUREN MILES

COBRA KAI SEASON 6 PART 1 STREAMS ON NETFLIX ON 18 JULY.

NETFLIX

FESTIVAL ROUND-UP

FRENCH FANCIES

Our guide to the best of this year's CANNES FILM FESTIVAL...

ANORA

A popular if slightly surprising choice, Sean Baker's raucous comedy drama was awarded the Palme d'Or by the Greta Gerwig-led jury. Mikey Madison (*Scream*, *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*) offers up a career-making turn as Anora, a spiky Brooklyn lap dancer who looks to have hit the motherlode when she marries one of her clients, the wayward son of a Russian billionaire (Mark Eydelshteyn). But this fairy tale soon turns nightmarish when his furious parents send their minions to force her into an annulment. Baker (*Tangerine*, *The Florida Project*, *Red Rocket*) deftly pivots from physical comedy, including one insane fight scene, to dramatic pathos, as he explores wealth, class, entitlement and self-preservation.

EMILIA PÉREZ

One of the favourites for the Palme, Jacques Audiard's Mexican-set musical took home the Jury prize and a joint Best Actress award for the cast - Zoe Saldaña, Selena Gomez, Adriana Paz and Karla Sofía Gascón, who plays the title role. The jury got it absolutely right. The story of a cartel boss who undergoes gender-reassignment surgery, emerging as Emilia Pérez, it's a socially conscious showstopper that surprises at every turn. Memorable songs penned by French siren Camille mix with sharply choreographed routines from Damien Jalet, including a jaw-dropping Busby Berkeley-style routine at a Swiss clinic.

AMERICAN ZOETROPE, APPRENTICE PRODUCTIONS ONTARIO, SHANNA BESSON, CAESAR FILM, NEON, PROSPERO PICTURES, TEASHOP PRODUCTIONS, WILDSIDE, WORKING TITLE FILMS, UNIVERSAL PICTURES, VIXENS

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THE SUBSTANCE

Audible gasps were heard in the press screening as Coralie Fargeat's feminist body horror unfolded in glorious Technicolor. Demi Moore excels as a TV fitness instructor who injects a mystery liquid and, quite literally, births a younger self (played by Margaret Qualley). Needless to say, this battle for beauty does not go well. Think *Carrie*, think Cronenberg, and, when the splendid prosthetics really kick in, think Brian Yuzna's *Society*. The film won Best Screenplay, anointing Fargeat (*Revenge*) as one of the most exciting voices in genre cinema right now. A delightfully demented look at ageing and stardom.

THE SURFER

'Eat the rat!' yells Nicolas Cage. It's another meme-able Cage moment destined for social-media sainthood, in Lorcan Finnegan's marvellous tale of men 'finding themselves' in the age of emasculation. The star's turn as a father who confronts a gang of rowdy surfers at an Aussie beach spot is a fine addition to his rogues' gallery, while Julian McMahon adds weight as the chief antagonist. Irish filmmaker Finnegan (*Vivarium*) also plays neatly on the idea of terrifying locals from Down Under (think *Wake in Fright*). Everybody needs good neighbours? Too right.

MEGALOPOLIS

Francis Ford Coppola's return to Cannes with his self-funded $120 million epic, a curious mix of science fiction and Roman-era politics, drew both admiring glances and venom from the critics. Set in the futuristic New Rome, Adam Driver is Cesar Catilina, the ambitious architect who dreams of building the titular city for the people. With a fine support ensemble, there were some standouts, including one audacious moment of what can only be described as live interactive theatre. Like Cesar's planned city, was this Coppola's grand folly or the culmination of a dream? You'll have to decide.

THE APPRENTICE

Or 'Trump: The Early Years'. Ali Abbasi's slick-but-shallow take on the ex-President in the 70s, as he built up his real-estate empire, was one of the hot tickets in Cannes. Sebastian Stan plays it straight, making his Donald Trump largely unrecognisable from the lurid cartoon figure that has dominated headlines. *Succession*'s Jeremy Strong, however, kills it as Trump's attorney Roy Cohn. Meanwhile, a scene showing Trump sexually assaulting wife Ivana caused the Trump campaign to threaten legal action.

LIMONOV: THE BALLAD OF EDDIE

Scored to the sound of Lou Reed and the Sex Pistols, Russian director Kirill Serebrennikov (*LETO*) stormed back to Cannes with this absorbing portrait of poet and dissident Eduard Limonov, who founded the National Bolshevik Party. Ben Whishaw cuts loose as Limonov, with the radical rebel-rouser falling in love as violently as he plots revolution. Spiriting audiences through the 70s and 80s, this came baked with an anarchic flavour that captures the essence of the era.

THE SHROUDS

Any David Cronenberg film needs to be celebrated, but this maudlin graveside tale found the Canadian maestro on muted form. Vincent Cassel plays Karsh, a grieving entrepreneur who builds a high-tech cemetery. With digital screens set into the headstones, mourners monitor their loved ones' decaying corpses in real time. It's a brilliant idea, but one that failed to translate into anything of dramatic value. Diane Kruger gives her all as Karsh's late wife, seen in extensive flashbacks, and her twin sister. There's also a nicely shabby turn from Guy Pearce. But with a conspiracy-riddled plot laden with exposition, it felt dead on arrival. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

NEXT BIG THING

DAVID JONSSON IS BURSTING ONTO THE SCENE

The star of last year's charming Peckham-set romcom *Rye Lane*, David Jonsson is a stage-trained actor with his sights on the screen. About to make his first major franchise play as 'artificial person' Andy in *Alien: Romulus*, the in-demand performer is also penning fashion retail series *Hype* for *Baby Reindeer* production outfit Clerkenwell. Not bad for a… human.

What stood out to you about Andy?
He's the first Black synthetic, and there are many other firsts with Andy, which I won't spoil. When you meet Andy he needs a system update, really! He's not functioning on all cylinders. But who is he underneath it all? That's the biggest part of his story.

Were you surprised by the film's practical approach?
I'm an indie boy, you know? I was a little bit terrified of walking onto set, and seeing green balls everywhere. But when I did walk on set for the first time – oh my God, all those things just melted away. We had, honestly, the best people on this. And when you're acting scared against aliens, the more things that are actually there, the better.

Did *Rye Lane* open doors for you?
Absolutely, without a doubt. It's wonderful that people took to it, but I'm still reeling from the way that people see me as an actor. I would have expected to be cast – I mean, [the scripts] came through – in more romantic comedies. I'm just really grateful that people want me to do different things, and are opening that door.

You're also moving into writing and producing, is that the priority going forward?
I'm an actor first. But I do think you have to give back to the system, and part of doing that is creating good stories. All I can say right now is that I'm definitely interested in doing more than just eating my breakfast on set. **JORDAN FARLEY**

ALIEN: ROMULUS OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 16 AUGUST.

JOE QUIGG

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The not-so-super siblings

EXCLUSIVE

APOCALYPSE VOW

THE UMBRELLA ACADEMY S4 Steve Blackman promises answers as his superheroes return one last time. Spoilers for S1-3 ahoy...

After Allison brained her father at the end of [Season 3] and he didn't get to reset the universe quite the way he wanted, we know the world might be a little different,' says Steve Blackman, showrunner of Netflix's superhero smash *The Umbrella Academy*. 'The siblings are no longer superheroes. What does it mean to be ordinary when you've been extraordinary for so long?'

What, indeed? But that's just one of several questions left dangling at the end of Season 3. Will we ever unravel the mysteries of billionaire Reginald Hargreeves and just why he formed the Academy in the first place? Will the seven siblings (played by Tom Hopper, David Castañeda, Emmy Raver-Lampman, Robert Sheehan, Aidan Gallagher, Justin H. Min, and Elliot Page) regain their powers in order to face down whatever apocalypse the fourth and final season serves up? And will there be time, in just one more season, to tie everything up to fans' satisfaction?

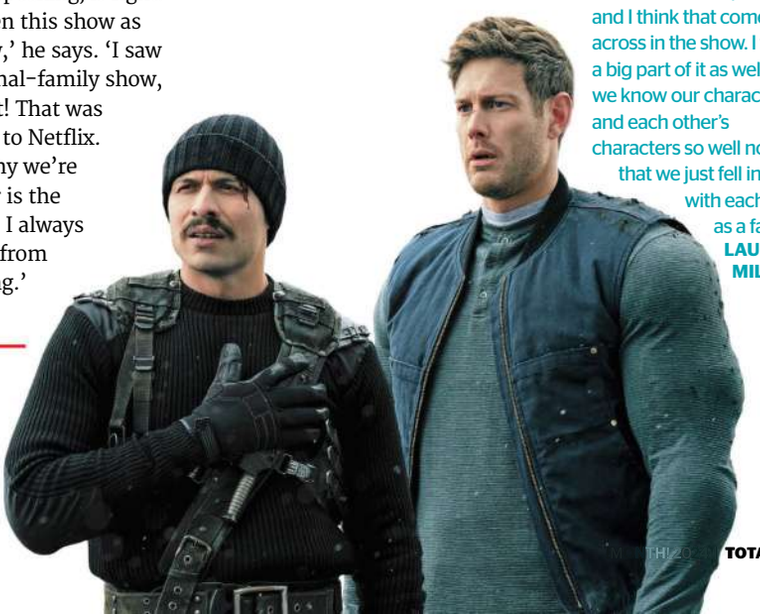
Blackman goes at it: 'We'll explain Hargreeves' motivations; we'll figure out a way to make them superheroes again, and this apocalypse is different – they don't know straight away what they're up against; the fans will be pleased as a lot of questions will be answered this year.'

Comprised of fewer episodes than normal (six), but of longer length (an hour plus), this final season brings back all the usual suspects and adds Nick Offerman and Megan Mullally to the mix ('They're husband-and-wife professors, Gene and Jean Thibedeau, and they might be up to no good…'), along with David Cross ('He's a mysterious character, I don't want to say too much'). It promises to be an event – and, says Blackman, *Umbrella* is ending now not because superhero fatigue has rained on the parade, but because the time, narratively speaking, is right.

'I've never seen this show as a superhero show,' he says. 'I saw it as a dysfunctional-family show, with a body count! That was my original pitch to Netflix. Perhaps that's why we're still around? Four is the perfect number – I always knew the ending from the very beginning.'

JAMIE GRAHAM

THE UMBRELLA ACADEMY S4 STREAMS ON NETFLIX ON 8 AUGUST.



NETFLIX

Q&A

Tom Hopper

How does Luther react to not having powers any more?
The big thing for Luther is that he's not had this body for so long. I think there's a part of him that wants to embrace the lost years, and he's got this youthful body back. The main thing for Luther as well is keeping the family together. That's paramount to him.

What was it like to play a depowered Luther?
It was fun. I got to wear normal clothes for once! It was quite nice to go to work and not have a big suit on. The prosthetic days were long, especially in the summer months when it gets very hot. There's very little ventilation and it's skin-tight. But it also makes me embrace that part of Luther when I'm in that suit. You feel more cumbersome and clumsy.

What was the atmosphere on set like, knowing this is the last season?
To be honest, it was a really fun one. We really let loose and I think that comes across in the show. I think a big part of it as well is that we know our characters and each other's characters so well now that we just fell into it with each other as a family.

LAUREN MILES

PRIME VIDEO

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EXCLUSIVE

RETURN OF THE RINGS

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RINGS OF POWER S2

The showrunners talk breaking bad for Season 2...

We like to say that Season 1 was primarily about our heroes,' Patrick McKay and J.D. Payne, showrunners of *The Rings of Power*, tell *Teasers*. 'But Season 2,' they add, 'is all about the villains.'

Indeed, the first season of Amazon's ambitious *The Lord of the Rings* prequel series, set thousands of years before Peter Jackson's groundbreaking films, ended not with a heroic victory, but with Sauron (Charlie Vickers) unveiling himself. Throughout the season, we also saw the half-Elf, half-Orc Adar (Joseph Mawle) build an army intent on crushing the inhabitants of Middle-earth; the men and women of Númenor edge towards civil war; Mount Doom erupt; and a Balrog emerge from hibernation.

'This time, Sauron's agenda sets everything in motion: Adar [Sam Hazeldine, taking over the role from Mawle] and his army of orcs; Galadriel [Morfydd Clark], Elrond [Robert Aramayo] and Gil-galad [Benjamin Walker] and their armies of elves – all of which will come crashing together in the most ambitious battle our show has seen yet, a battle from which many big players may not make it out alive,' the showrunners say.

'But as much as the conflict between good and evil gets bigger in scope this season, it also becomes more intimate. What's arguably the central relationship of the season, between Sauron and Celebrimbor [Charles Edwards], is all about temptation, manipulation and corruption. It's a descent into madness. So as much as it's a bigger season in terms of scope – with epic action, dark sorcery and hordes of evil creatures – it's also a more personal and psychological one.'

Elven blacksmith Celebrimbor was one of the more minor characters in the first season, playing a small role within Elrond's story. Now, the showrunners say, he has 'arguably become the principal protagonist'.

Meanwhile, the Dwarves dig deep into Moria. King Durin III (Peter Mullan, pictured here) disowned his son, Durin IV (Owain Arthur), after he went against his father's wishes and excavated Mithril. 'A recurring motif in mythology centres around a king's failing health leading to a sickness in the land that endangers the entire kingdom,' McKay and Payne say. 'Season 2 sees a fractured relationship between King Durin and his son take on a similar larger dimension.

'Just as the King has become deaf to the pains of his own son, the Dwarves have lost their ability to hear the mountain. This precarious position makes them ripe targets for Sauron's offer of Dwarven Rings as a panacea – but it all comes at a price: King Durin's sanity. As the ring stokes his greed, it drives the wedge between father and son deeper, ultimately bringing them to the brink of a split that may have greater consequences than any threat they have faced thus far...'

Darkness really has come to Middle-earth. **JACK SHEPHERD**

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RINGS OF POWER S2 STREAMS ON PRIME VIDEO FROM 29 AUGUST.

Contributing editor **LEILA LATIF** has something to say...

Melissa Barrera in *Abigail* is an imperfect mother who isn't condemned for her 'sins'

THIS MONTH...
HOW THIS YEAR'S FILMS ARE REPRESENTING MOTHERHOOD DIFFERENTLY...

THE LEILA WORD

As the old saying goes: men would rather make an arthouse horror movie that explores their psychosexual obsession with motherhood than go to therapy. Darren Aronofsky's *Mother!*, David Cronenberg's *The Brood*, Lars von Trier's *Antichrist*... and Ari Aster went so far as to do it twice with *Hereditary* and *Beau Is Afraid*. From Greek mythology to modern-day movies, if you are a mother, it's near impossible to get it right.

Even more feminist fare from female directors, including *Titane*, *We Need to Talk About Kevin* and *The Babadook*, have seen monstrosity in motherhood. And while nearly every film listed is a phenomenal piece of cinema (excluding *Mother!*, which by my estimation is in contention for the worst film ever made), it still feels disheartening, as a fan of edgy films with two kids, that so many portrayals of being a mum involve being punished for your shortcomings.

Part of being a parent is never feeling you're getting it right. If you work too much you're messing up your offspring by being absent, but if you have no identity outside of your children, you might one day be invited to their directorial debut and have to sit through a movie that sees a proxy of you violently tortured.

This year things seem to be looking up for cinema's mums, with films showing us that being imperfect doesn't mean hellfire should rain down upon you.

In *Abigail*, Melissa Barrera plays Joey, a former army medic who's estranged from her young son. Just because she's been an imperfect parent doesn't make her a figure of contempt and, without giving away any spoilers, she's afforded an amount of grace that subverts the insidious trope of motherhood meaning unending sacrifice. Also, in a horror hit, we had *Immaculate*, where a young nun played by Sydney Sweeney faces a twisted form of the immaculate conception in an Italian convent. Despite the patriarchy's best efforts, she refuses to be reduced to being a walking, talking, non-autonomous womb.

Outside of genre fare, generosity of spirit seemed to abound as mothers were seen as more than just mothers. Luca Guadagnino's *Challengers* saw Zendaya as a complicated, ambitious woman who is devoted to her daughter but also wants other things for herself. She's still a sexual being who wants to be recognised for her myriad talents, and Guadagnino's film doesn't view this as worthy of scorn and retribution.

In Michael Showalter's *The Idea of You*, a slightly lighter take on love and lust, Anne Hathaway's Solène falls for a dreamy young pop star she meets when taking her daughter to Coachella. Despite this complicating her relationship with her child, she ultimately is permitted a little happiness. There are compromises to be made, but what saves the day is Solène being able to balance her child's needs with all her other dreams.

Perhaps my favourite mums came in the form of action stars. In George Miller's *Furiosa*, they are motorcycle-riding badass heroes who can land a perfect shot even when on fire. In Denis Villeneuve's *Dune: Part Two*, Rebecca Ferguson stole the show, newly tatted up and playing puppet master to secure her position of power.

As a mother, I don't need or want perfect representation on screen. I just want it to be complicated and messy and not so often resort to being punitive and Oedipal. But things are looking up in 2024, and it might just be down to filmmakers trying to do something fresh and subversive with their mother characters – but my money is on there being some great mums who've raised filmmakers able to have a clear-eyed view on parenthood. I also suspect there are some really great therapists out there...

LEILA WILL BE BACK NEXT ISSUE. FOR FURTHER MUSINGS AND MISSIVES FOLLOW @LEILA_LATIF ON X.

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SOUND BYTES

The month in dialogue and digits.

‘I THINK PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY OF MOVIES TELLING THEIR STORIES AND TRYING TO CHANGE THINGS FOR THE BETTER IS ONLY GOOD.’

CANNES JURY PRESIDENT **GRETA GERWIG** ON HOW FRANCE’S BELATED #METOO MOVEMENT IMPACTED THE FESTIVAL.

‘SEX WAS ALWAYS THE GREAT SELLER; I DON’T KNOW WHY THEY BACKED OFF FROM THAT. HOLLYWOOD STARTED FEEDING THIS NEW GENERATION [OF] CHARACTERS THAT WERE SEXLESS. SUPERHEROES DON’T HAVE SEX. THEY DON’T HAVE GENITALIA.’

DIRECTOR **RICHARD LINKLATER** MOURNS THE LOSS OF ON-SCREEN SEX.

30 THE NUMBER OF LINES OF DIALOGUE **ANYA TAYLOR-JOY** HAS IN *FURIOSA: A MAD MAX SAGA*

60 THE NUMBER OF CHARACTERS THAT COULD RETURN IN THE NEXT **AVENGERS** FILM

‘You would think that if someone spent that much money on their own film that they would be so controlling and so particular about every single thing. But there was a real sense of collaboration.’

AUBREY PLAZA HAS NOTHING BUT GOOD THINGS TO SAY ABOUT WORKING WITH FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA ON *MEGALOPOLIS*.

HIGH TIME

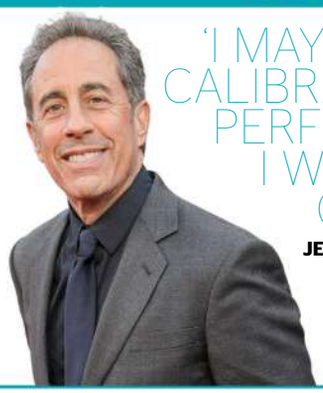
AFTER STARRING IN 2002’S *28 DAYS LATER*, CILLIAN MURPHY IS OFFICIALLY RETURNING FOR DANNY BOYLE’S *28 YEARS LATER*.

GOOD THING

BAD THING

TOUGH TIMES

PIXAR HAS LAID OFF 175 WORKERS – 14% OF ITS STAFF.

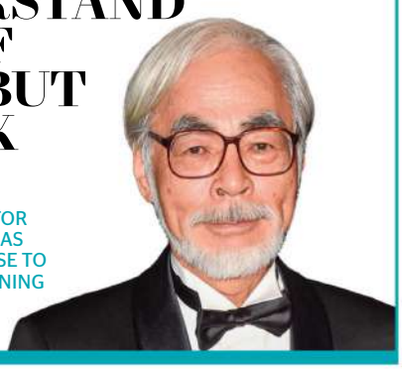


‘I MAY NOT HAVE CALIBRATED THAT PERFECTLY, BUT I WOULD NOT CHANGE IT.’

JERRY SEINFELD BELATEDLY APOLOGISES FOR THE SEXUAL UNDERTONES IN *BEE MOVIE*, BUT SEEMINGLY HAS FEW REGRETS.

‘I DON’T UNDERSTAND ANY OF THIS, BUT THANK YOU.’

ACCLAIMED DIRECTOR **HAYAO MIYAZAKI** HAS A HUMBLE RESPONSE TO STUDIO GHIBLI WINNING AN HONORARY PALME D’OR.



ALAMY, GETTY, WARNER BROS.

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5 THINGS

BLOODSPORT

THOSE ABOUT TO DIE Roland Emmerich takes on a sword-and-sandal epic.

1 IT'S BASED ON A BOOK BY DANIEL P. MANNIX

Developed by *Saving Private Ryan* scribe Robert Rodat, sword-and-sandal series *Those About to Die* shows the ruthless, bloodthirsty side of the Roman era. Roland Emmerich and Marco Kreuzpaintner take on directing duties, following the tales of gladiators, chariot racers, slaves and an Emperor in 69 AD. It's loosely based on the book by Daniel P. Mannix, which also inspired *Gladiator*. 'It describes how important and unique bloodsport was,' Emmerich explains of the source material.

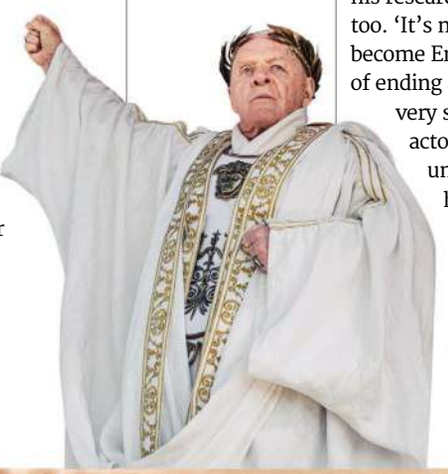
2 IT'S A SPORTS SHOW SET IN THE ROMAN ERA

'I was always wondering why nobody did a pure sports show in the Roman Empire,' the director continues, admitting he's fascinated by the era. 'It has so much more. There's the gladiators, there's the beast fights, but there was also horse racing and chariot racing.' He also points out that Romans were as obsessed with sport as we are now: 'The interesting part for me is how close it is to our situation today. You see all these hooligans, soccer fans, and it's like the same thing.'

3 EXPECT POLITICAL INTRIGUE

While the focus is on the action, Emmerich adds that there's a side plot about Anthony Hopkins' Emperor Vespasian – who was a real person, and the fourth Emperor to rule in 69 AD – and his two sons (played by Tom Hughes and Jojo Macari). 'There is a lot of intrigue, because people in that time were always in competition,' he explains. 'If there's an older [brother] and a younger [brother], it's like, "Either I kill you or you kill me."'

'People in that time were always in competition'
ROLAND EMMERICH



4 IT RECREATES ROMAN ARCHITECTURE DIGITALLY

Roman architecture is very distinctive, but as Emmerich points out: 'There's very little standing that doesn't look like a ruin.' So for *Those About to Die* they adopted a hybrid technique of building sets, but also creating virtual environments. 'I didn't want to go for blue screen or anything like that,' the director explains of the choice. 'That always looks very inorganic, and I wanted to have smoke and all these kinds of things on the set.'

5 ANTHONY HOPKINS' EMPEROR VESPASIAN IS COMMANDING

Would you expect any less of the veteran actor? Emmerich describes Vespasian as 'this grumpy old man' who's 'tough to his sons'. He clearly did his research before casting Hopkins, too. 'It's not like Vespasian wanted to become Emperor, but he saw the need of ending a civil war and reigned in a very strict way.' It sounds like the actor playing him was similarly uncompromising. 'He knew all his lines, but if you wanted him to say something else, he didn't do that!' Emmerich laughs.

LAUREN MILES

THOSE ABOUT TO DIE STREAMS ON PRIME VIDEO ON 19 JULY.

Expect bloody violence in new series *Those About to Die*

PRIME VIDEO

Lily (Blake Lively) and Ryle's (Justin Baldoni) instant connection later takes a dark turn

EXCLUSIVE

NEW BEGINNINGS

COLLEEN HOOVER'S IT ENDS WITH US

Blake Lively stars in the bestseller adaptation.

I had no idea what I was about to read,' says director Justin Baldoni (*Five Feet Apart, Clouds*) of Colleen Hoover's *It Ends With Us*, which he picked up in his search for a moving story to adapt for the big screen under his Wayfarer Studios banner. He found one. 'I just remember sobbing and feeling like this could help so many people feel seen and do so much good in the world.'

Hoover's 2016 book, which soared in popularity in 2021 due to the influence of TikTok's 'BookTok' community, follows Lily (played in the movie by Blake Lively), who grew up watching her mother be abused by her father. When her childhood sweetheart Atlas (Brandon Sklenar) comes back into her life, Lily's relationship with the fiery Ryle takes a turn for the worse.

Baldoni decided to take on the role of Ryle himself, despite knowing how much the character intimidated him: 'I was terrified. I talked myself out of it multiple times. It was actually the fear of playing that character and experiencing his darkness via acting that drove me to do it.'

Despite some of Ryle's more negative qualities, the actor-director hopes that the film will show him as a well-rounded character. 'My hope is that the movie takes his humanity to the next level to help us understand why Lily would be with him.'

When it came to casting Lily, Lively was an obvious option. Baldoni was approached by her agent, and she'd already read and liked the script. 'It was very clear from moment one that she was Lily,' he recalls of their meeting. 'She's so strong, smart and funny – all of the things you want your protagonist in a movie with this much depth and soul to be. Luckily she said yes.'

'This book has helped so many people – and the film can do the same thing'
JUSTIN BALDONI

Baldoni, on set, also directs the movie

While the director is keen to please fans of the book ('Our readers are the ones who made it possible for me to even turn this into a movie,' he adds), he also believes that the story is one with universal appeal. 'There's a reason the book did so well globally. You reach in and use art to touch [people's] soul[s]. I think you can ignite a spark that can create change within them. This book has helped so many women, so many people – and I know that the film can do the same thing.'

Baldoni believes that universal appeal will translate into commercial success, but, as evidenced by his previous work on *Clouds* and *Five Feet Apart*, the message is equally important. 'Even if it's just for a moment, if my job can help someone feel like they're seen or heard, or help them feel like they're not alone in this human experience, then I can't think of anything more creatively fulfilling as an artist than that.' **LAUREN MILES**

COLLEEN HOOVER'S IT ENDS WITH US OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 9 AUGUST.

SONY PICTURES RELEASING

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Jenna Coleman plays Ember Manning, a cop whose past comes back to haunt her

PIER PRESSURE

THE JETTY Jenna Coleman's new crime thriller is set in the murky waters of a post-#MeToo world.

'I wanted to put unfiltered female rage on screen,' says screenwriter Cat Jones about her new BBC thriller *The Jetty*. Arriving later this summer, her dark drama sets Jenna Coleman's rookie cop Ember Manning the job of figuring out who torched her lakeside hometown. However, in doing so she gets dragged into an old missing person's case that brings troubling secrets from her own past back to the surface. 'The depths of Ember's anger [surprised me]. I realised we all have that capacity for rage,' adds Jones. 'It's there, simmering.'

Repressed emotions run high in *The Jetty*. Set in a fictional Lancashire town, Ember is forced to reevaluate her adolescence and grey areas of consent while investigating a cold case involving a love triangle between two teenage girls and an older man.

'I wanted to explore the toxic way some men relate to young girls, whether there's been any progress in a post-#MeToo world and if there are pockets of the country where less progress has been made,' explains Jones. 'I remember being at school with girls who would get into what they felt were consensual relationships with grown men. I think about them now and wonder how they reflect upon that. Do they see themselves as grooming victims? It felt like an interesting thing to explore through a detective show.'

Teasers glimpsed this troubling tale play out firsthand on a set visit in Manchester last December. The shoot was also beset by issues with a dodgy roof in a building doubling for Manning's police HQ, grinding production to a halt.

As the series' starry ensemble, which includes *Alien: Romulus*' Archie Renaux as Ember's partner and Ralph Ineson as her boss, awaited a restart, there was time to sit with the story, something Jones hopes viewers do, too. 'I wanted to ask difficult questions and let the audience do the rest. Some stuff we get into is very clear-cut but a lot is very grey,' she reasons. 'It'd be great to think we're provoking arguments in households.'

SIMON BLAND

THE JETTY IS COMING TO BBC IPLAYER AND BBC ONE THIS SUMMER.

BBC

Jenna Coleman

What was it about *The Jetty* that spoke to you?
The character of Ember. As soon as I read [Jones' script] I felt her voice on the page. Ember felt so fully formed; she was a human before she was a detective, which was important. It felt poetic, too. The imagery of the water, the sexuality, blurred boundaries, young girls, nostalgia, memories, trauma, the subconscious and how all those things wove together, flicking the light between timelines and what that did to Ember as a character.

Ember has to re-evaluate her past. How does that change her?
She feels settled but this is very much a story of somebody rediscovering herself, her past and who she is. There's a tension between her moral compass and her stubbornness, which means she can't look away [from the truth], but by doing so, her life is falling to pieces. By moving forward in her case, Ember is unravelling her past.

How did you find shooting Ember's darker scenes?
It was liberating. It's interesting when a case becomes personal – and that happens to Ember. There's one scene where she's angry and railing against the system, one that's ultimately broken. Female anger is interesting to explore because it isn't seen as much – that animal rage. **SB**

BETWEEN TAKES

GWENDOLINE CHRISTIE ON GETTING INTO A CHARACTER'S MINDSET AND THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF *GAME OF THRONES*...

What do you always take to set?
I need to be thinking about my character from the moment I arrive on set: I find objects can be an endless supply of inspiration for that. I might take a photograph, use a certain scent, but often for me, it's usually music. There was a PJ Harvey track I used for one character and it was quite confronting. I found that listening to that endlessly would immediately put me into the character's mindset.

Have you ever stolen anything from a film set?
No – I have always asked for things, but I've always been told 'no'! In the early days of *Game of Thrones*, people used to be given a prop that was most significant to their character. But then HBO said they were too valuable to be given away as gifts, so we didn't get those any more. I was very sad never to receive my sword, Oathkeeper.

What's been your best on-set experience?
I really loved working with Jane Campion on *Top of the Lake* and was hugely fortunate that Jane wrote that role for me. It was terrific working with Elisabeth Moss, too: a colossal actor whose talent knows no bounds. We worked extremely hard together and had a similar working method. I loved the experience of working with the degree of detail we did on that set.

And your worst?
I would say that there were some challenging times when we filmed *Game of Thrones*. You could be in extremely heavy armour outside during the winter in torrential rain or gale-force winds during long night shoots – none of which is a recipe for delightful happiness! The cast and crew all found a way to perversely laugh in the face of this adversity and bond.

What did you enjoy most about the set of *Robin and the Hoods*?
I was endlessly impressed by the young cast: they were just so talented, refreshing, open and full of life. They taught me so much about being free, taking risks, being unafraid to fail, to be passionate about every choice, and to just be in the moment in that wonderful way children can be.

'NOBODY EXPECTED *GAME OF THRONES* TO BE THE MUCH-LOVED, ENDURING, GLOBAL PHENOMENON THAT IT BECAME'

Christie as Aura in the upcoming *Robin and the Hoods*

Have you given or received any memorable end-of-shoot gifts?
No, but there's a great story about Elizabeth Taylor asking for presents on set, which would be jewellery. I believe she wouldn't start work until she'd received her present then halfway through, she would expect her second present: a similarly expensive set of jewellery in order to finish the film. That's a nice idea – not one I'm looking to implement soon – but I'm always open to that!

Do you maintain friendships with the cast and crew?
On set, something quite magical happens whereby you have an immediate friendship with someone but you might not see them for years. The second you meet again, it's as though no time has passed at all: you pick up exactly where you left off. Part of the beauty of being a performer is the intensity of these relationships: they can be over very quickly but often they are so significant that you never forget the beautiful energy of that time together. And when it resumes, it's one of the most wonderful parts of the job. There are also people with whom you become friends for life.

What's the best wrap party you've been to?
Game of Thrones. Nobody expected that show to be a success or the kind of much-loved, enduring, global phenomenon that it became: we were very bonded as a cast because of that. The wrap was just a group of friends all together delighting in the time we'd shared creating this thing we loved.

ELIZABETH AUBREY

ROBIN AND THE HOODS STREAMS ON SKY CINEMA ON 26 JULY.

MATT DOYLE/CONTOUR BY GETTY IMAGES, SKY CINEMA

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Chloe Coleman and Dave Bautista return as Sophie and CIA agent JJ

EXCLUSIVE

THE ITALIAN JOB

MY SPY: THE ETERNAL CITY Dave Bautista and Chloe Coleman take a trip to the Vatican – and get more than they bargained for...

I don't want to tempt fate,' director Peter Segal says of planning sequels too soon after a film's release. It makes sense, especially with the hand fate dealt him when it came to 2020 action comedy *My Spy*. After the film opened in cinemas in mid March and closed the following day, Segal never expected that the then-shelved movie would be bought by Amazon, subsequently becoming one of the biggest films of the year thanks to its streaming release. 'Suddenly they were talking about a sequel!'

Life can't *all* be about thwarting nuclear attacks

Said follow-up, *My Spy: The Eternal City*, sees the return of CIA agent JJ (Dave Bautista) and his young apprentice Sophie (Chloe Coleman), now a teenager. Coleman's growth in the intervening years was something Segal very much wanted to incorporate into the story, not least because he lacks the power to halt time. 'The other way to go would be to start feeding her lots of cigarettes and hope to stunt the growth, but we knew that wasn't on the cards,' he adds with a grin.

Drawing on his experience as a parent, Segal co-wrote the script for the sequel, which sees JJ chaperone Sophie on a school trip to Rome. Of course, there's more to it, as they also have to foil a nuclear scheme aimed at the Vatican.

'Like all sequels, you want to make it bigger, better, funnier, and more dramatic,' the director explains of his goals for the film. Luckily, Amazon provided a budget that allowed him to do that, with *My Spy: The Eternal City* being shot entirely on location in Italy and Cape Town, South Africa. When it came to the latter, the shoot wasn't without its challenges.

'There's something called load shedding, which we learned when we got there. The power goes out about three times a day, and I thought, "How the heck are we going to make a movie?" But they figure out how to do things with generators.'

Aside from Bautista and Coleman, Ken Jeong also returns for the action sequel, with new cast additions in the form of Anna Faris and *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*'s Craig Robinson. It sounds like they enjoyed their time on the movie. 'Craig would frequently go into bars that had a piano at night and just play. Then he'd call Ken at 10 o'clock, and then call me and say, "Guys, come on over, me and Ken are gonna sing." And by the time we got there, he and Ken would just be improv-ing by the piano,' Segal recalls.

'Like all sequels, you want to make it bigger, better, funnier, and more dramatic'
PETER SEGAL

When it comes to the prospect of making a third film in the series, he cautiously says: 'If there's a third one, we're ready to tell that story,' but, as always, he's not looking to tempt fate.

LAUREN MILES

MY SPY: THE ETERNAL CITY STREAMS ON PRIME VIDEO ON 18 JULY.

PRIME VIDEO

TRAILER BREAKDOWN

FIXER UPPER

WOLFS Clooney and Pitt laugh off the body blows...

1

Called by a panicked Margaret (Amy Ryan) to dispose of a dead body, sleek professional fixer Jack (George Clooney) arrives on the scene declaring, 'There's nobody that can do what I do.'

2

Knock, knock. Who's there? Why, it's fixer Nick (Brad Pitt). Yep, a royal cock-up means these two fiercely competitive lone-wolf cleaners must now somehow work together to dispose of the corpse.

3

Only it's not a corpse – why else would it be played by *Euphoria*'s Austin Abrams? Not only does it wake up in the trunk of the car, but it's in possession of lots of drugs.

4

As Jack and Nick take turns to interrogate their charge, it's clear that real-life pals George and Brad still share the comic chemistry they brought to *Burn after Reading* and the Ocean's movies.

5

Men with guns are, naturally, after the drugs. The scene is set for writer-director Jon Watts (the MCU Spider-Man trilogy) to again spin a tale of laughs, heart and action.

6

And what action! Check out the slo-mo spectacle that brings the trailer to a rousing climax, as our walking, talking corpse graduates to a flying cartwheel over a speeding car. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

WOLFS OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 20 SEPTEMBER.

APPLE STUDIOS, SONY PICTURES RELEASING

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Faraz Ayub is fast-food worker Adam – who *might* be an alien

EXCLUSIVE

MOTORWAY MADNESS

SKY PEALS Moin Hussain's British-Asian sci-fi boldly goes where no film has gone before...

When writer-director Moin Hussain left school, he got a job in a McDonald's drive-thru. 'It was a lot of night shifts and lonely burgers,' he tells *Teasers*. Little did he know this experience would feed into his feature debut, *Sky Peals*. Faraz Ayub plays Adam, who works the night shift in a service-station fast-food restaurant. When his estranged father dies, Adam discovers that his late parent believed he was an alien.

As Adam begins to track his father's final movements, his own life becomes increasingly strange, as he suffers blackouts, his presence even setting off car alarms. Akin to Jonathan Glazer's *Under the Skin*, it makes for a highly unusual British genre piece. 'It doesn't have all the bells and whistles of a sci-fi film,' says Hussain, 'but thematically it's a story about being human and the best sci-fi films explore that sort of thing.'

It really took shape when Hussain cast Ayub as Adam. 'The character doesn't give much away. He's very internal,' says Hussain. 'And Faraz surprised me right away with what he wasn't doing instead of what he was doing.' Together they workshopped Adam, the actor drawing from his experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. 'I definitely utilised those feelings and those anxieties, and how everybody was feeling around me... The isolation was easy to plug into,' Ayub explains.

It's a film that's a metaphor for otherness. Like Adam, Hussain is half-British, half-Pakistani. 'One of the starting points for me was... I don't speak any Punjabi or Urdu. I've never been to Pakistan. It's part of me and part of my culture, but it's something I don't understand,' he says. 'Wanting to understand and to inhabit that, but not really knowing how, is part of the genesis of that character.'

'The character doesn't give much away. He's very internal'
MOIN HUSSAIN

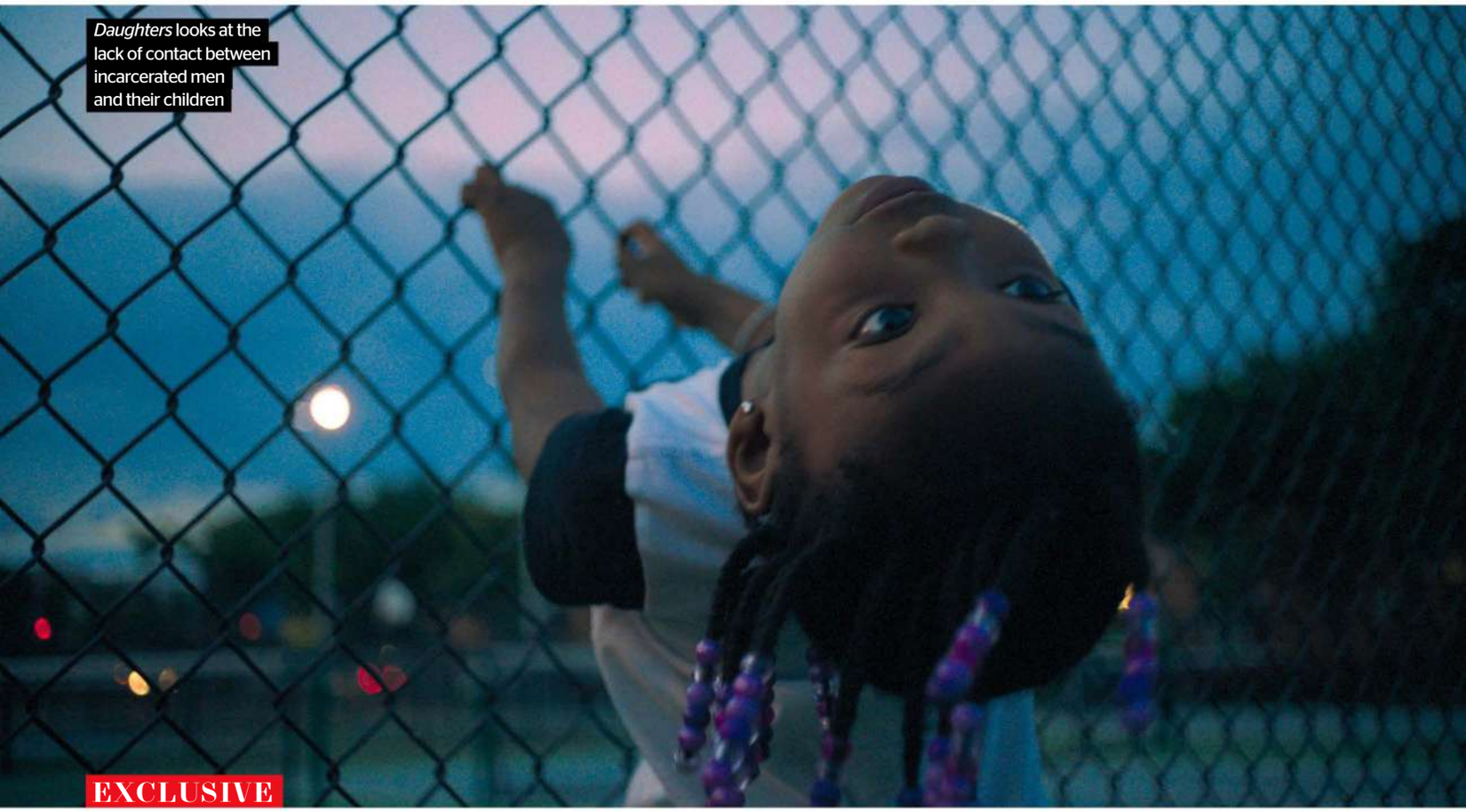
The half-British, half-Pakistani character of Adam drew on Hussain's own identity

As Ayub notes, Adam's quest is about understanding his identity. 'There's a question he's asked in the film: where are you from? And he mistakes that to be who he is.' Indeed, *Sky Peals* is a deliberately ambiguous experience. 'I felt like I wanted to tell a story about a character who goes on a massive journey and changes, but only very incrementally moves his life,' explains Hussain.

Shot in Yorkshire, the 'Sky Peals' service station where Adam works was made up of various locations, including a shopping centre and a disused sports facility. 'It was creating an imagined service station of my dreams!' laughs Hussain. For Ayub, with all the night shoots, it was tough but ultimately rewarding. 'You're physically exhausted, but at the same time, you're creating art,' he says. 'So it's labouring in our own way, but with a passion for what we love.' Now that's blue-sky thinking. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

SKY PEALS OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 9 AUGUST.

BFI DISTRIBUTION, LISA STONEHOUSE © ESCAPE FILMS



Daughters looks at the lack of contact between incarcerated men and their children

EXCLUSIVE

DAD DANCING

DAUGHTERS A Netflix doc sheds light on a programme that reunites girls of colour with their incarcerated fathers.

Having been the CEO of non-profit Girls for a Change since 2012, Angela Patton never thought she'd have the time to make a documentary. And yet the release of *Daughters*, which she's co-directed with Natalie Rae, is on the horizon. Chronicling a programme pioneered by Patton that arranges daddy-daughter dances in prisons, the documentary follows both the fathers as they receive life-coaching sessions in the run-up to the event and the daughters as they process their feelings about seeing their dads again.

'I really saw this story being so powerful from the girls' perspective,' says Rae, who approached Patton to make the film after watching her give a TED Talk. Patton herself admits that the movie likely wouldn't have happened without Rae: 'What made me give it some time – that I didn't believe I had – was Natalie's tenacity and her perseverance.'

Rae wasn't the only one passionate about the project. The Washington DC prison they filmed in was immediately on board. 'They were like, "Let's put this into practice in a week or two,"' Rae recalls, and they quickly found funding for the project.

While the film is called *Daughters*, a lot of focus is placed on the work that the fathers do before seeing their children again. 'It's important to me for people not to just see a daddy-daughter dance that's cookie cutter, with tiaras and glitter,' Patton explains of the choice. 'I needed people to know that this was beyond a dance. This was people having hard conversations and letting go of hurt and pain, and it was also to bring to light some of the unforgivable practices of the criminal justice system in America.'

With many US prisons scrapping in-person visitation and charging for virtual visits and phone calls, it's easy to see how these girls are affected by their fathers' absence. 'The ability to touch, and the need to touch, was something that every single father and daughter said was the main thing they'd want to change [about the visitation system],' Rae adds.

The fathers involved must also put in work to be ready to see their daughters again

'I needed people to know that this was beyond a dance'
ANGELA PATTON

The filmmakers watched their young subjects grow up a lot during filming, including the youngest, Aubrey, who's only five years old at the start of the movie. 'You see, within three years of no touch and little communication, what happens to the spark and optimism that Aubrey has, and this super-strong connection with her father,' Rae explains. 'She starts shutting down and is colder with him.'

Daughters is certainly an eye-opener, and the journeys the girls go on show the importance of a programme like this. As Rae says: 'We see how having a father in your life can really change you as a human being, and that nothing's permanent.' **LAUREN MILES**

DAUGHTERS STREAMS ON NETFLIX ON 14 AUGUST.

NETFLIX

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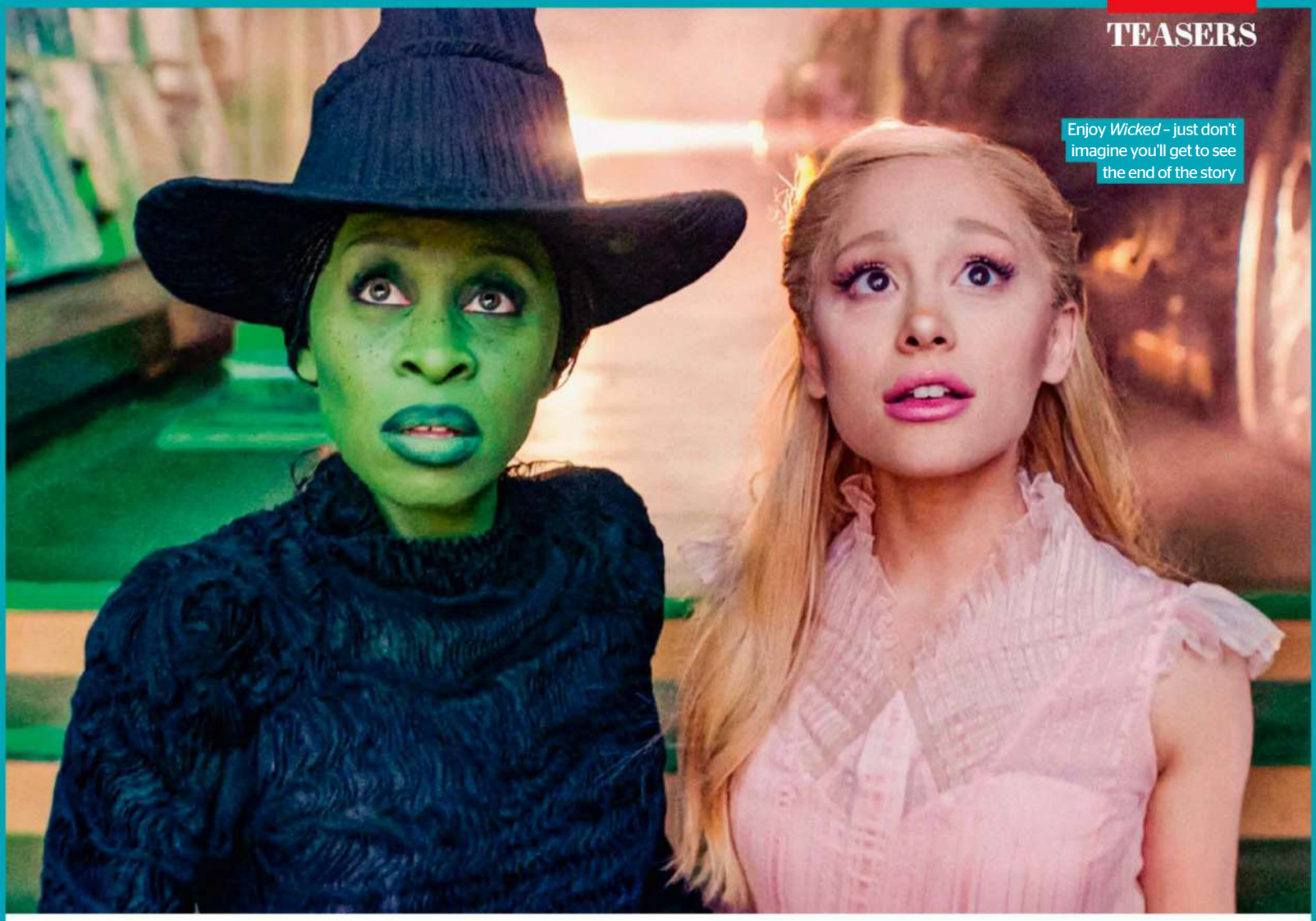

Enjoy *Wicked* – just don't imagine you'll get to see the end of the story

CAN WE TALK ABOUT?

DISHONEST TRAILERS

WHY DO STUDIOS KEEP OMITTING IMPORTANT DETAILS FROM THEIR BLOCKBUSTER MOVIE PROMOS?

JOEL HARLEY
@JOELHARLEY

'It's a cautionary tale!' sing best pals Damian and Janis (Jaquel Spivey and Auli'i Cravalho) within the opening seconds of 2024's *Mean Girls*, moments before the story swings to the African plains – and another big musical number. Wait, what?

Unsuspecting haters were duly horrified to see Tina Fey's coming-of-age classic give way to a seemingly impromptu high-school musical – fleeing from the aisles as though pursued by an apex predator. Who can blame them? The trailer didn't exactly advertise that this would be an adaptation of the Broadway musical – and not a 'remake' of the first film at all.

Intentionally misleading trailers are nothing new, more ethically utilised to protect big blockbuster surprises (the Hulk in Wakanda; Thor's right eye). But lying to dupe viewers is very much a different matter. See, for instance, a 2022 lawsuit in which two cinemagoers attempted to sue Universal Studios, bitter at being promised Ana de Armas when all her scenes had been cut from Danny Boyle's *Yesterday*. This year, *Madame Web* overpromised a cohort of Spider-Women, glimpsed only fleetingly in the film. They don't even go here!

> 'LIES IN TRAILERS ARE MOST PREVALENT WHEN IT COMES TO MUSICALS'

Lies in trailers are most prevalent when it comes to musicals. Recent trailers attempted to sneak *The Color Purple* and *Leo* past unaware audiences with dialogue-heavy trailers, while suggesting that *Wonka* would restrict its singing purely to the Oompa Loompa. Not so. One can only imagine the fury of edgelord Joker fans when *Folie à Deux* is released as a jukebox musical. *Wicked* may defy the trend in not hiding its Broadway roots, but it's not telling the whole truth either – the trailer giving no indication that the famous story has been split into two films for double the ticket sales.

Such porkies by omission cynically obscure what studios fear will put off a wider audience – scared by poor test scores and box-office failures of musicals like *West Side Story* and *In the Heights*. What does it matter if audiences walk out when the golden tickets have already been sold? This attitude speaks to a profound disrespect for the medium – and for those tricked through the doors. Do musicals, and audiences, deserve better? We'd argue they do.

ALAMY

Ex-schoolteacher Ms. Lia (Mzia Arabuli) and former pupil Achi (Lucas Kankava) form an unlikely bond

EXCLUSIVE

TURKISH DELIGHT

CROSSING Levan Akin's 'odd couple' story finds community and empathy in Istanbul...

No one ever said making independent movies was easy. 'Every time you make a movie, you're like, "Why am I doing this? It's horrible!"' laughs Swedish filmmaker Levan Akin (*And Then We Danced*). 'You know what I think? Making movies is like a bad plane ride. As soon as you step off the plane, you forget about it. It's always crazy and tumultuous.'

His latest film, *Crossing*, was no different. The story follows Georgian schoolteacher Ms. Lia (Mzia Arabuli) and her former pupil Achi (Lucas Kankava) as they travel to Istanbul on a mission. 'In Georgia, there's such a gap between generations, they can't communicate,' says Akin, explaining why he created this mismatched pair. 'It's like one is speaking Chinese and one is speaking French. They can't meet. It's so fascinating.'

Their reason to head to Istanbul? Lia, to honour her sister's dying wish, wants to track down her estranged transgender niece, Tekla (Tako Kurdovanidze) – a journey that sees them embed into Istanbul's soulful trans community. Akin says he wanted to tell a story of empathy, not enmity. 'Humans, we always want to help each other when we can. I want to show that. To me, that's the reality. Not that other reality where people are suspicious of each other.'

Casting the film also meant bringing together two leads, Arabuli and Kankava, from very different worlds. Unsurprisingly, the off-screen dynamic mirrored what was happening on screen. 'She was a little irritated with him in real life, too, because he has a lot of energy, and asked a lot of questions and she just wants to be left alone!' Akin, though, kept everyone sweet. Literally. 'In Sweden, we have very good candy. I brought that to the set.'

'Humans... we always want to help each other when we can'
LEVAN AKIN

The pair travel to Istanbul to track down Ms. Lia's trans niece

The director vibrantly captures Istanbul, a major city that hasn't been put on film as much as it deserves. 'When I was a child, I used to go to Istanbul every summer with my family,' he explains. 'It's so diverse. You walk around the corner to a very religious neighborhood, and then you go two streets up and it's the most gay-friendly [area], men and women are walking hand in hand. I love Istanbul for this.'

With the film unveiled earlier this year at the Berlin Film Festival, Akin admits he felt the pressure before it was selected. Not getting picked for one of the major movie events in the calendar can often mean your movie is branded a failure, he notes. 'That's horrible. Now I feel with this film, like, "OK, I made it. It came to a festival. People seem to appreciate it. I dodged the bullet." That's how I feel. It's like robbing a bank, and then getting away with it.' **JAMES MOTTRAM**

CROSSING OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 19 JULY.

MUBI. HAYDAR TASTAN

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THE HERO

SHARMEEN OBAID-CHINOY

THE TWO-TIME OSCAR-WINNING DIRECTOR ON STORYTELLING, DOCUMENTARIES AND WORKING ON FRANCHISE PROJECTS...

Few people have a career as varied as Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy. In over two decades the Pakistan-born director has been a journalist, then a documentary filmmaker, before moving into animation and live-action narrative fiction. Oh, and she's also won two Academy Awards. Now she tells *Teasers* about new documentary *Diane von Furstenberg: Woman in Charge* and her upcoming Star Wars project starring Daisy Ridley…

How did you come to make a documentary about fashion designer Diane von Furstenberg?

Diane gave me an award in 2013. Then a few years ago, she reached out to me and said that she wanted to do a film about the women who Vital Voices gives awards to, so we tried to develop a little bit of that story. After my second Zoom with her, I told her, 'People want to hear your story,' and she said, 'I'm not ready to tell my story.' One day I got a call from Fabiola [Beracasa, producer] and she said, 'Diane's ready to tell her story, but she's saying only you can tell it.'

What made you want to get into filmmaking?

I've been a storyteller from the age of 14; that's when I became a print journalist. I was writing for English-language newspapers in my home country of Pakistan. By the age of 17, I was doing undercover investigative work. At that age you get hooked on stories. I didn't realise that film would become the vehicle for my storytelling, but the world changed on 9/11. After that, many people were going into my part of the world and telling stories, but not really understanding the nuances of the situation. So I decided that I would do something visual.

Your documentary *Saving Face* won an Academy Award. How did that affect your career?

I didn't even know that you could win an Academy Award for documentary films! I'd won an Emmy in 2010, and that had elevated a lot of my work, but winning the Oscar was so important. To come from where I came from, and to follow the yellow brick road to the Oscars, I created my own path to get there. What was incredible was that Zakia [Parveen, one of the film's subjects] was able to realise that telling her story had such a great impact, that she was able to influence legislation; she was able to influence the way people saw the strength of Pakistani women.

Was it a big change to then go into animation with the 3 Bahadur films?

I wanted to create Pakistan's first animation studio that was run by a woman. Animation, at least in my home country, was a very male-dominated field, and I wanted to get as many women into the process as I could. It was a very rewarding experience, but also it kicked my ass, because you can't just wake up one day and decide to set up an animation studio and expect it to be a bed of roses. Animation is expensive, and it's very technically challenging in a country like Pakistan.

What was it like directing episodes of *Ms. Marvel*?

Ms. Marvel was such a special series because it shattered the stereotype of what we all think superheroes can be. On the sets there was such incredible camaraderie. Every single person knew what they were doing was important, that millions of young people around the world would be identifying with this young woman. Marvel Studios was an incredible partner to have. Studios have a way of taking the creativity of filmmakers sometimes, because it needs to fit in the superstructure that's been created. But Marvel Studios was excellent.

What can you tell us about your upcoming Star Wars film starring Daisy Ridley?

It's a story 15 years after *Episode IX*, and Rey Skywalker returns to set up a Jedi academy. That's the bit Kathleen Kennedy [president of Lucasfilm] has revealed to the world, so that's the bit I'll share with you! **LAUREN MILES**

'I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW THAT YOU COULD WIN AN ACADEMY AWARD FOR DOCUMENTARY FILMS!'

From top: TV directing gig *Ms. Marvel*; winning an Oscar in 2016; and documentary subject Diane von Furstenberg

DIANE VON FURSTENBERG: WOMAN IN CHARGE STREAMS ON DISNEY+ FROM 25 JUNE.

ALAMY, GETTY, BINA KHAN

THE SUPER-

DEADPOOL IS BACK AND HE'S NOW A BONA FIDE MEMBER OF THE MCU WITH WOLVERINE ALONG FOR THE RIDE. **TOTAL FILM** SPEAKS TO FRIENDS FROM WORK RYAN REYNOLDS, HUGH JACKMAN AND DIRECTOR SHAWN LEVY ABOUT JOINING THE BIG LEAGUES, RESURRECTING WOLVERINE, AND HOW DEADPOOL MAY BE MARVEL'S MESSIAH BUT HE'S STILL A VERY NAUGHTY BOY...

WORDS LEILA LATIF

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ODD COUPLE

Hugh Jackman is back as Wolverine, almost 25 years after he first played the role

Matthew Macfadyen joins the cast as TVA agent Paradox

Wade Wilson goes by many names: Deadpool, The Merc with a Mouth, The Regenerating Degenerate and now… Marvel Jesus. Not only is he the self-proclaimed messiah and saviour of the MCU, but he has also performed his own miracle – the resurrection of Hugh Jackman's Wolverine.

Deadpool & Wolverine director Shawn Levy admits that – post strikes and alongside a widely reported epidemic of superhero fatigue meaning it's the only comic-book film of the summer – positioning Deadpool as the potential saviour of the MCU has particular resonance. 'I would love to take credit for those parallels,' Levy tells *Total Film*. 'Some we absolutely intend, but some are coincidences, and we came up with "Marvel Jesus" two years ago.' But Levy isn't concerned that people won't show up for future MCU instalments: 'People love to get on bandwagons whether they're positive, but frankly even more when they're negative.'

Six years after *Deadpool 2*, we are reacquainted with our crimson-suited hero. He's proving to be useless at selling cars, hawking Blind Al's (Leslie Uggams) blood-pressure meds to make rent, and his beloved Vanessa (Morena Baccarin) has a new boyfriend. But despite insisting to his pal Peter (Rob Delaney) that he's over the whole superhero thing, when the Time Variance Authority come a-knockin', after just a few minutes with Matthew Macfadyen's TVA agent Paradox explaining how he is needed to protect the Sacred Timeline, Deadpool can't resist stepping up to the plate with a joyful, 'Suck it, Fox, I'm going to Disneyland!'

> 'DEADPOOL IS GETTING A PROMOTION HE NEVER IMAGINED… IT IS VERY PARALLEL TO RYAN REYNOLDS BEING WELCOMED INTO THIS FRANCHISE'
>
> SHAWN LEVY

As Levy explains, the metatextual layers of the action comedy extend beyond the fourth-wall-breaking jokes Deadpool is known for. Following the acquisition of 20th Century Fox (which made the previous 'Pool films) by Disney in 2017, this film candidly celebrates Deadpool's first official outing as a member of the MCU. 'Deadpool is getting a promotion he never imagined would happen,' Levy says. 'It is parallel to Ryan Reynolds being welcomed into this lofty superhero franchise. But we had no idea it would be this unique moment where people are asking what the MCU means any more. Can it surprise us? Can it break moulds in ways that we don't expect? We certainly hope that this movie is an answer to those questions.'

Obvious spoiler alert: Wolverine is along for the ride, too, with this iteration featuring the classic yellow suit Jackman never wore in the X-movie timeline. He's not the only new addition, with actor Emma Corrin playing Cassandra Nova, a telekinetic villain with an intriguing history in the comics. And there's been much speculation about other familiar faces, even if the specifics remain closely guarded secrets. Of course, canine variant Dogpool will also debut (and possibly steal the show).

This seems to be a different Wolverine from the one we knew – one who let his own world down

Wolverine finally gets to wear his classic yellow suit

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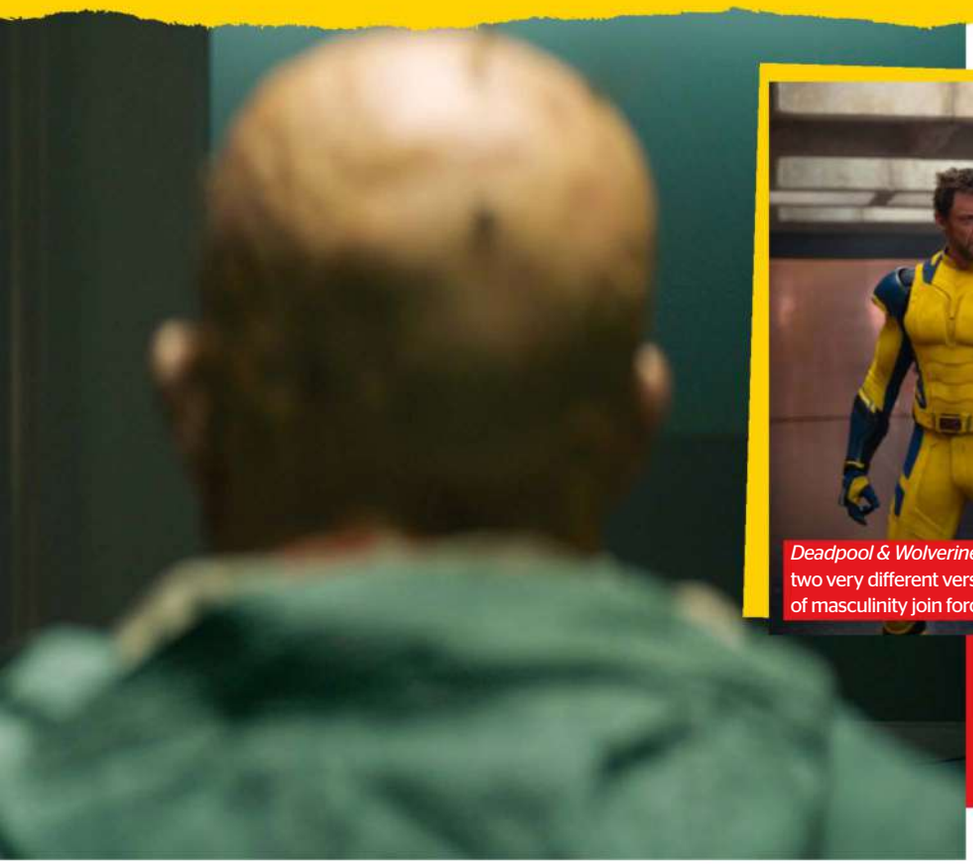
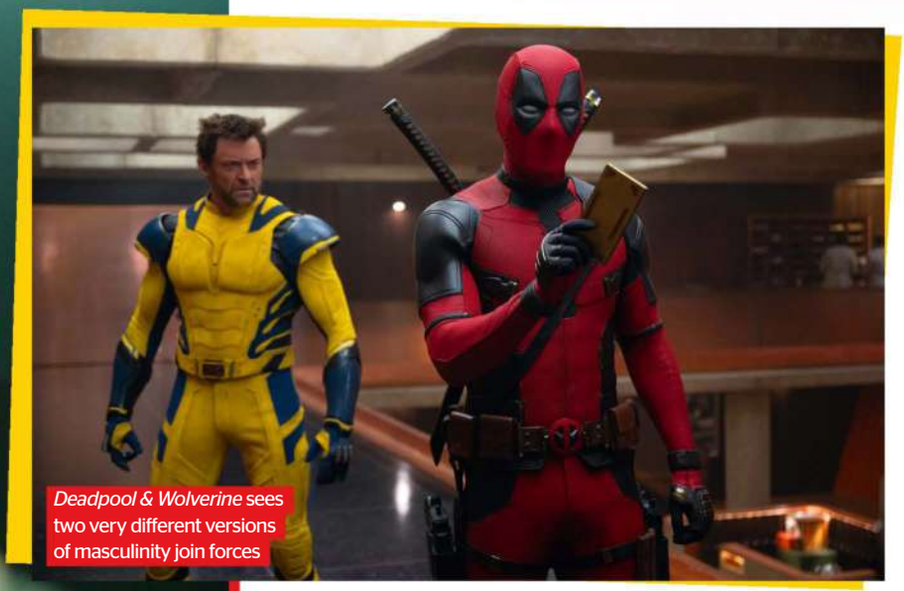




Deadpool & Wolverine sees two very different versions of masculinity join forces

CLAWS AND EFFECT

Despite closing the book on the character in 2017's mournful neo-western *Logan*, Jackman was tempted back for Wolverine's first official MCU film. In part because of his long-standing friendships with Levy and Reynolds, but also from a desire to mine new depths of the character. The Australian movie and theatre star has played a wide breadth of roles in musicals, dramas and thrillers over the years, but the hyper-masculinity of Wolverine is a stark contrast to his own all-singing, all-dancing reality, and he tells *Total Film* that explorations of masculinity are 'something I find fascinating. In Australia, our culture does give different flavours, but actually I think the more interesting thing is how connected it is. And where I connect with the character is how in both [North American and Australian cultures] there is the shame.'

When it comes to the shame that accompanies the pressure to adhere to masculine expectations he adds that, 'Hopefully there's more in the character Wolverine than there is in me, but there are repressed feelings there, right? There are all these different things I feel underneath. There is anger, there are all sorts of things that I'm obviously tapping into playing the part, so I find this role to be a gift and it's clearly something cathartic and healing for me. I know I'm being a little open here, but I think that's the real strength of these characters and comic-book movies, in that through wish fulfilment it's allowing us to collectively look at what is underneath.'

Reynolds has also subverted the expectations around the prototypical Hollywood leading man with his willingness to poke fun at himself, including but not limited to wearing prosthetics that make him look like a 'boiled testicle'. He explains to *Total Film* that despite one half of the film's double act being an embodiment of old-school brooding masculinity and the other being a pansexual motormouthed violent pervert, they have more in common than a supernatural ability to heal.

'They're both in a deep, internalised routine of shame, where so many different maladaptive coping mechanisms come out,' Reynolds says. 'For Deadpool, it's using humour to deflect anything that might render him vulnerable. And for Wolverine, it's really a sense of masculinity and violence.' But beyond the shame spirals at their cores, Reynolds sees a contrast in expression. 'Deadpool, for me at least, has always been very feminine, and I find that to be very freeing,' the actor says. 'I'm not bound by any of the constraints of that sort of traditional to toxically masculine portrayal of a superhero.'

> 'DEADPOOL, FOR ME AT LEAST, HAS ALWAYS BEEN VERY FEMININE, AND I FIND THAT TO BE VERY FREEING'
>
> RYAN REYNOLDS

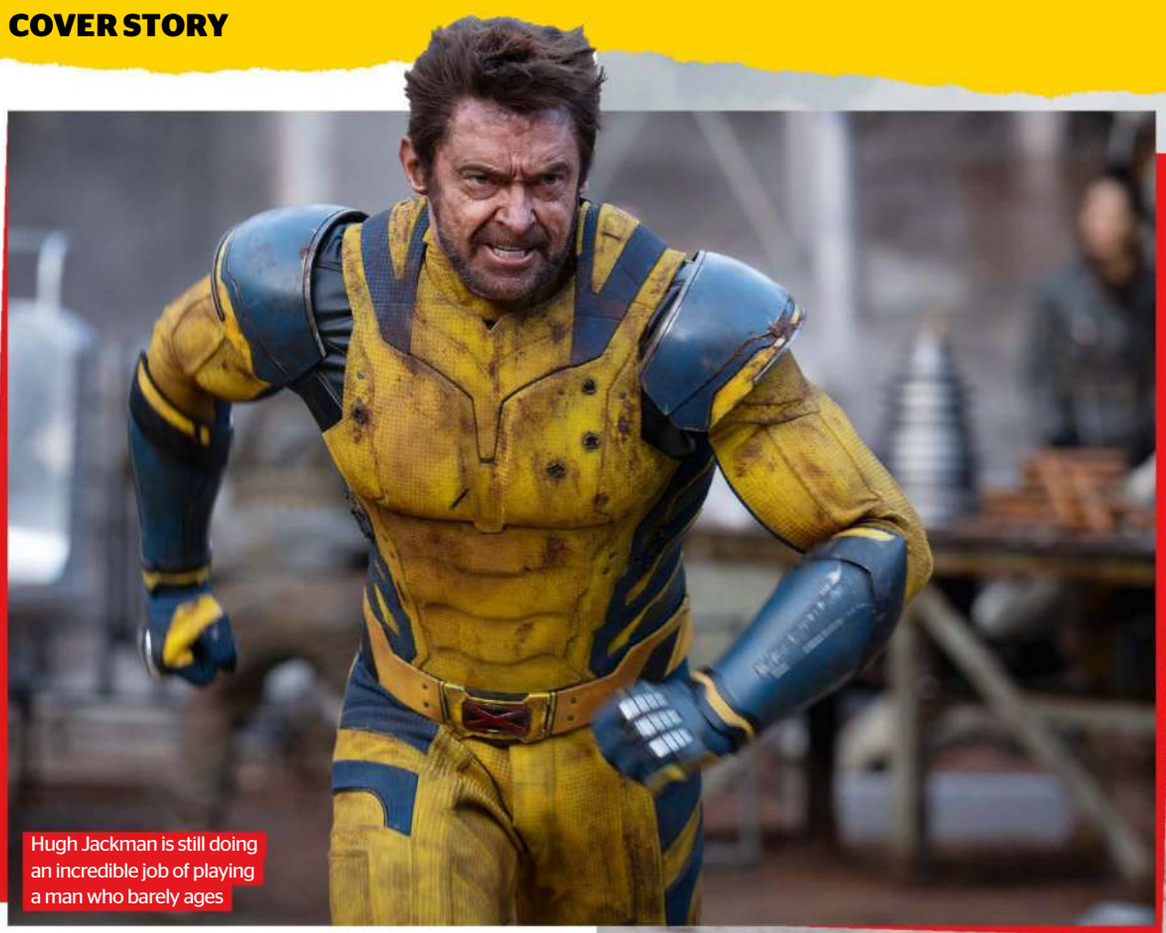
Jackman now holds the record for the longest career as a live-action Marvel character and has been portraying anger issues via adamantium-claw carnage for 24 years. But unlike the hype surrounding his latest outing, his debut in 2000's *X-Men* came with markedly lower expectations. 'We were on the low-tide version of that genre,' Jackman recalls. 'It'd gone way up with the Batman movies and fizzled out. But when the X-Men came in, people felt like it represented the source material about giving voice to the marginalised.'

Audiences poured into cinemas expecting something splashy and fun and instead watched a film that opened with a child being torn away from his mother

Emma Corrin is new bad guy Cassandra Nova

The TVA give Deadpool's suit an upgrade for this third film

DISNEY/MARVEL STUDIOS



Hugh Jackman is still doing an incredible job of playing a man who barely ages

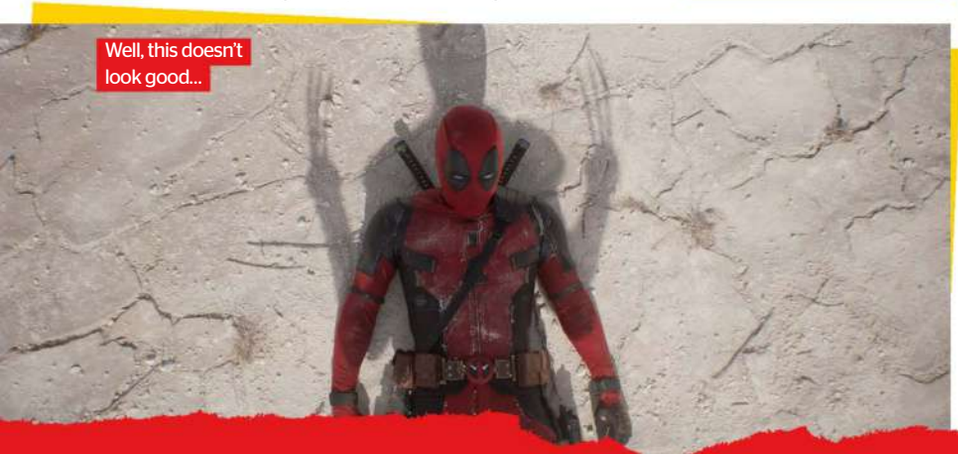
at the gates of Auschwitz, and explored Wolverine's palpable PTSD. Jackman's star was launched into the stratosphere, but according to the actor, 'Actually, a couple of people in the industry with their ear to the ground told me, "Keep auditioning because this thing is dead in the water."' One can only hope whoever those people were have since ceased giving actors such terrible advice, as Jackman's Wolverine would appear in nine more films, including cameos. Meanwhile, when *Deadpool* came out in 2016, the superhero genre was going from blockbuster behemoth to blockbuster behemoth, but Reynolds points out that 'the movies were quite congruent with each other at that point. *Deadpool* was different, and then right after *Logan* was potentially the greatest comic-book adaptation ever made.'

MASK FORCE

Unlike his stars, Levy is new to this world and remembers seeing *Deadpool* on its opening weekend and thinking, 'What am I even watching?!' But now these former underdogs have become titans of the genre, and the pressure is on Levy, which is ironic given the premise is, as the filmmaker puts it: 'Welcome to the bigs. Do you even belong here?'

> 'RYAN CO-WROTE AND CO-PRODUCED AND STARS IN THIS MOVIE, AND HE STILL OUT-HUSTLES, OUT-WORKS, OUT-GRINDS EVERYBODY'
>
> SHAWN LEVY

Even for Reynolds, with his proven track record, there is no room for taking comfort in a near-guaranteed success ('If I ever thought that, we'd be fucked'), and Levy reminds *Total Film* this isn't just a case of going to the gym and landing zingers. 'I've worked with actors who get huge and with increased stardom comes increased complacency,' the director notes. 'Bear in mind, Ryan co-wrote and co-produced and stars in this movie and created so much of the DNA of this franchise, and he still out-hustles, out-works, out-grinds everybody.' As executive producer Wendy Jacobson puts it, on set there's always a push to strive for more and 'Ryan always just throws in these tiny flourishes'. Fittingly for the self-proclaimed Marvel messiah, 'It's like he's channelling something from the Divine.' Even after scenes are shot, the nature of



Well, this doesn't look good...

Peggy, a pug-and-Chinese-crested cross from East Yorkshire, debuts as Dogpool

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'A quarry? What is this, *Doctor Who*?'

having a masked protagonist works to their advantage, thanks to the magic of ADR. 'We do have the capability to keep punching it up and we take audience feedback really seriously,' Jacobson adds. 'Lucky for us none of the filmmakers and writers are super-precious and like, "I wrote this line and it's got to be this." So if a moment or a joke they're obsessed with falls flat on its face, it's out of the movie.'

That relentless quest to make *Deadpool & Wolverine* as good as it possibly can be meant that Reynolds, though he was keen to bring Levy on board for their third film in a row together, felt it was only fair to warn him that with great power comes crushing responsibility. 'I told [Shawn]: "There's a reason it's been so many years since the last one. It will swallow your entire life whole. It is hard on you. It's hard on your family. Once you get something that you think is 100% exactly how you want it in the movie, now you have to make it 20% better." That's the sort of mindset you need'

While Hollywood history is littered with tales of hardship in the name of achieving greatness, Levy is quick to clear up that's not the case here. 'I've done like 15 movies and my God, so many stars are assholes!' he says. 'But the ones like Ryan, who are every bit as nice, hardworking, and thoughtful as you'd hope, are such a treat.' Many all-time classics have had infamously tough sets, but for Levy, 'I don't believe art needs to be generated out of torment.' Clearly not being an asshole is working for this team, with Levy now set to solidify his place in the big leagues and follow up his MCU film with a Star Wars one (and as *TF* goes to press, he's being linked to the next Avengers movie).

Shawn Levy takes over directing duties for this third Deadpool film

DREAM TEAM-UP

WHO SHOULD DEADPOOL BUDDY UP WITH NEXT?

WENDY JACOBSON: Titania, played by Jameela Jamil in *She-Hulk*. She's such a heightened, hilarious character and also an actor who can improv and is razor-sharp and can banter. I can't imagine being an actor, period, but I can't imagine having to work opposite someone like Ryan Reynolds, who is just so quick and so smart and so funny all the time – but that woman could handle it.

RYAN REYNOLDS: I made a movie called *Mississippi Grind* and I would love to see Deadpool hanging out with my character in that, Curtis. Seeing those two guys, because they have some overlap but there is something really sad about both of them, too. I'd love [that to] just be explored a little bit. How about you, Hugh?

HUGH JACKMAN: I'd love to see [*The Greatest Showman*'s] P.T. Barnum. We could do a musical together!

RYAN REYNOLDS: Don't tease now. Deadpool and P.T. Barnum, I'm in already. We're writing the treatment as we speak...

SHAWN LEVY: The thing about Deadpool is I think he makes everything more interesting because of his audacity. But, boy, I'd sure love to see Deadpool and Spidey. That's a movie I'd love to make. I feel like Tom Holland would run circles around everyone else.

Reynolds has said that Peggy was the animal version of Wade Wilson

Despite all the positivity this team brought to the project, there is a spectre at the feast, as the last time these two characters met up the reception was not exactly rapturous. *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* became infamous for literally removing the mouth from a character best known for never shutting up. But Levy points out 'that was very much an X-Men movie. This is very much a Deadpool movie and the rules are zero rules.' Though that first meeting is one of the less-beloved entries in Wolverine's canon, the desire to do the union right has been explicit since the end credits of *Deadpool 2*, which saw Wade travel back into *Origins* to shoot his mouthless incarnation through the skull and plead with Wolverine that 'Your old pal Wade is going to ask you to get back in the saddle again and when he does, say yes.'

BUDDY GOOD SHOW

Jackman has no regrets about getting back on the horse. 'I thought I was done but like a bolt of lightning I just knew I wanted to do it.' He and Reynolds are also clearly thrilled to see each other when their paired interview with *Total Film* kicks off, regularly showering each other with praise and deferring to each other's expertise. But as anyone who follows them online will be aware, the pair's love language is teasing each other (see p40). Jackman requests that there be 'only friendly fire', but moments later he jokes that the press tour itinerary involves having their eyes propped open with toothpicks and being made to watch Ryan Reynolds sitcoms.

Levy can't help but laugh when he quotes *Planes, Trains and Automobiles*, which was the film's greatest inspiration ('Those aren't pillows!'), pointing out that 'it has so much warmth and it's really this lovely redemptive story of a journey that changes its travellers'. That film combined the inimitable comedic talents of Steve Martin and the late, great John Candy. While Wolverine has a desert-dry sense of humour compared to quip king Deadpool, Jacobson says that '[Hugh is] just as funny as Ryan in this movie. It's all in an eye-roll and a little zinger here and there.'

The two actors have contrasting challenges. Jackman has to perform with minimal dialogue but seems sincerely floored by what Reynolds accomplished with his face concealed. 'When I went to film from theatre, everyone said this medium is ultimately about the eyes, and for the majority of the movie that is not there,' Jackman explains. 'To watch Ryan do this very detailed work where he'll do another take after looking at it because that movement of a wrist communicates something different from that and be that specific about it was a masterclass.' There are difficulties, too,

Leslie Uggams returns as Blind Al

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As ever, Deadpool's red suit helps hide the blood – well, his blood at least

'I THOUGHT I WAS DONE BUT LIKE A BOLT OF LIGHTNING I JUST KNEW I WANTED TO DO IT'

HUGH JACKMAN

Wolverine once said his adamantium claws hurt 'every time' – ouch

in stretching yourself vocally when you are speaking through fabric, but just as Deadpool's suit gets an upgrade (thanks, TVA), so did the filmmaking tech. Jacobson singles out 'our talented sound mixer Colin Nicolson, who basically invented a new kind of mic that was inside Ryan's mask to capture sound in a way that gave us so much clarity and didn't necessarily have the muffle that we're used to hearing from Deadpool.'

Levy is thrilled to be asked about the challenges of having an odd couple made odder by only one of them having his face on view. 'I could literally do an entire interview about the physical virtuosity of Ryan Reynolds as Deadpool, because trust me, nobody sees quite how brilliant it is because he makes it look so intuitive and effortless,' Levy says. 'You have this gruff, often non-verbal Wolverine against essentially circus-clown physical performing.' Most children growing up dreaming of being superheroes would not necessarily be hoping to be the boiled-testicle-hyper-sexual-clown one, but Reynolds is also happy to take those descriptors. 'When I was a kid I adored and really worshipped clowns,' he explains. 'So much of what I do with Deadpool is clown work. I remember the first time I ever put the suit on, I asked for just a day with a small skeleton camera crew to just play in this suit. The first few hours I was screwing it all up, and then I started to kinda get the hang of it, and grew it from there.'

KNIVES OUT

As the films, franchise and expectations grew around Reynolds – the addition of Wolverine now adding further star power – it was important for the series not to grow too large. As Jackman explains: 'In the MCU we see a lot of universe saving. But Wolverine and Deadpool are at their best when fighting something smaller and quite emotional.' But beyond an emotional connection that peels back layers on each character's metaphorical onions, there will be some exceptional badassery to enjoy, with Deadpool's shiny new adamantium katanas (thanks again, TVA) and Wolverine's faithful claws meaning they aren't resorting to flying through the air and shooting beams of energy at one another from a distance. For Reynolds, the forced proximity of their weapons of choice 'makes the fights more interesting'. Even a seasoned pro like Jackman, who's been performing superhero scraps for over two decades, found fresh approaches to the action here. 'I went from being at a point where I was like, "I can't think of one more thing I could possibly do in a fight sequence," to all of a sudden being in a movie where I'm doing all these things and in situations I've never been in before.'

Also, let's face it, proximity can lead to more than fighting, and adding as horny a character as Deadpool to Wolverine's life is going to change things up. In terms of sexual frisson between the pair, Jackman says, 'I never get that from Wolverine, but Deadpool can find sex in just about anything.' Beyond buddy movies, the path of hatred transforming into friendship is just as often

Jackman has expressed admiration for Reynolds' ability to act through a mask

Drugs are out, but Deadpool can still find ways to get high...

Cast and crew between takes on set

the basis of a beautiful love story. When *Total Film* suggests this pairing of a powerful taciturn man and a feisty figure who speaks their mind could become the MCU's own Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet, Reynolds gasps like a Regency heroine. 'I feel so elevated by that comparison, goodness gracious!' Jackman concedes, 'For Wolverine sex is equated to doing everything you can not to kill somebody, then I guess that's true.' Before Reynolds adds, 'When it comes to sex, these cats are not your standardised metric by which to gauge normal, healthy physiological functions.'

But in a cinematic universe where everyone is beautiful and few people are horny, Deadpool is an outlier. Jacobson has worked in the MCU on *She-Hulk* and is a long-term collaborator of Dwayne Johnson, who has a noticeably chaste filmography. 'I did *Skyscraper*, *Rampage* and *San Andreas*,' Jacobson says. 'So I have a lot of experience with that kind of traditional masculinity heroism lane and it was just really exciting to work on this hyper-sexual Deadpool because it was so different.' What's more, Deadpool's brazen kink isn't just limited to him, and even seemingly wholesome Peter reveals some truly astonishing piercing choices to which Levy can only say, 'Its always the quiet ones!'

'YOU CAN GET AWAY WITH A LOT IF YOU'RE FUNNY ENOUGH AND YOU ARE A HUMANIST STORY'

SHAWN LEVY

Peter's freshly studded genitals jangling in the wind as people seem to be pegging each other all the live long day is one thing, but when Blind Al suggests snorting some lines of Columbian marching powder, Deadpool quips, 'Cocaine is the one thing Feige says is off the table!' Even now, Levy seems nervous. 'I'm so wary of what I can say but certainly there were early conversations about overt drug use and we thought that was an interesting conversation. Let's actually write a dialogue scene about having had it.' That mischievousness seems to know no bounds and when *Total Film* mentions that it was an ex that introduced them to the *Deadpool* comics, the actors immediately start brainstorming revenge ideas, with Jackman suggesting a billboard or just 'DM us your ex's name, Ryan is still doing ADR and can put in some subliminal messaging.' Reynolds escalates with 'I'm not above sending them a strongly worded video.'

X-RATED

It's that naughtiness that makes spending time with Deadpool and the team behind it so much fun, but in an age where comedians complain about how audiences have become too sensitive and are unable to take a joke any more, Levy explains that 'you can get away with

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Cassandra Nova is telepathic with telekinetic abilities

Welcome to the Time Variance Authority...

a lot if you're funny enough and you are a humanist story. At the core of this movie, there is not a cynical view of people.' But beyond the warm fuzzy centre of this redemption story, 'I would also add that Deadpool is an equal-opportunity offender. So there's a freedom to say and do audacious things because no one is safe.'

The fourth-wall breaking means that Deadpool can stare out at the audience and crack jokes about movie executives, actors and even the audience itself, just as *She-Hulk* did in her Disney+ outing. But Jacobson points out this is not a gimmick as, 'Like in *She-Hulk*, Deadpool breaking the fourth wall is so ingrained in the publishing history and who these characters are.' Reynolds explains that it means 'Deadpool also really gets to be the audience, and one thing I never let go of working with Hugh is I'm genuinely his number-one fan. You can equate that in the Kathy Bates, Stephen King context or in just the healthy, mature, two-grown-ass-adult-guys-who've-done-a-lot-of-work-on-themselves-and-are-able-to-have-a-really-wonderful-connection... Let's go with the latter.' So in this instance, art is imitating life, imitating art as 'we have to go through conflict with these two, but in Deadpool's heart there is a genuine love for this guy.'

Just like Annie Wilkes, Reynolds is Jackman's 'number-one fan'

That genuine love seems to extend across the team. After a very long road with the finishing line in sight, Levy says he's grateful to be talking to *Total Film* as 'nothing makes me happier than talking about this thing that I love'. While Jacobson believes they've created a film that, particularly given how thick and fast the jokes come, has unprecedented rewatchability. 'When you're in post on a movie or a show and you're watching it a million times you would think that it gets old. But for me it's still funny. I laugh out loud at the same jokes. It's the gift that keeps on giving.' And as for Marvel Jesus himself, the pressure might be on, but he's extremely grateful to all those who had faith in him. 'There's a part of me that feels like this is the most exciting moment of my life,' Reynolds says in a rare moment of straight-talking sincerity. 'I'm in the big leagues.'

Spot the nod to Deadpool co-creator Rob Liefeld

DEADPOOL & WOLVERINE OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 25 JULY.

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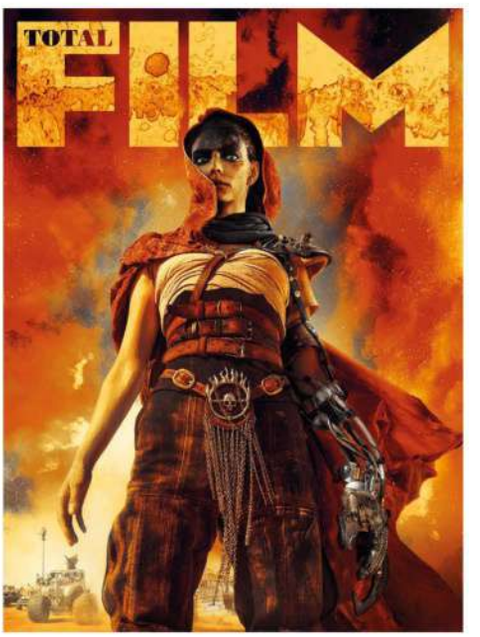

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PIONEER SPIRIT

After a 21-year hiatus, Kevin Costner returns to the director's chair for **Horizon: An American Saga**, an epic self-funded western that he plans to take across four films. As the first two chapters land, **Total Film** meets the iconic star and his cast to discuss the bloody birth of a nation.

WORDS: JAMES MOTTRAM

Kevin Costner is riding out once again. More than two decades after his last film as director, the absorbing 2003 western *Open Range*, he's returning to the Old West once more. *Horizon: An American Saga* is not just ambitious, it's the culmination of a lifelong desire to tell a story on the grandest scale. When the moustachioed Costner sits down in the Carlton Hotel in Cannes, sporting a beige jacket and white trousers, he has an air of satisfaction about him. To borrow from his spiritual baseball drama *Field of Dreams*, if you build it, they will come.

Largely self-financed, this epic western has been planned by Costner to span four films. Premiering *Chapter 1* out of competition in Cannes, he has already shot the second chapter, due in cinemas in August – the same month he starts shooting the third instalment in earnest (preliminary shooting is already under way). In this risk-averse Hollywood era, studio heads looked at Costner like he was a madman when he proposed a quadruple movie series. 'I said, "Well, we have to make four because the story's not over until the fourth one,"' he explains, eyes glinting. 'Now I have to figure out where I can get more money to finish it.'

Set in the era of the American Civil War, beginning in 1859, *Horizon* is a sprawling ensemble, crossing Wyoming, Kansas and Montana, as Costner shows the expansion of the American West. Disparate characters make their way, ultimately, to Arizona's San Pedro Valley, which plays host to Horizon, a new township. It's here where the battle is fought between the white settlers and indigenous Native Americans, who stake their own claims to the land.

'I DON'T HAVE TO ANSWER TO ANYBODY... I HAVE FINAL CUT. I DECIDE WHAT'S GOING ON'

KEVIN COSTNER

'In westerns... we always come to a town that's already there,' says Costner. 'It's already there. And I started thinking, "Why are they already there?" They're like mushrooms! They come up in the rain! But all these towns, there must have been real drama at first, because there were [indigenous] people there before that didn't want to give up the good spots. It's not like we didn't know where the good spots [were] either. And it's not like they didn't know either.'

Costner began the project over 35 years ago, back in 1988, two years before he'd make his Oscar-winning directorial debut *Dances with Wolves*, the film that truly cemented him as Hollywood's modern-day chronicler of the Old West. He commissioned a script, initially envisaging *Horizon* as a single film. Even so, it took another 15 years before he approached Walt Disney Pictures, who turned him down.

It would take another two decades for Costner to finally get *Horizon* off the ground, emboldened perhaps by the success of *Yellowstone*, Taylor Sheridan's western series in which he starred. Yet despite this, Costner still had to dip into his own pocket to finance the project. 'I don't have to answer to anybody. But I've had a couple of investors come in with me. And so I feel my responsibilities to them, and to get their money back for them. So I have final cut. I decide what's going on.'

Abbey Lee plays sex worker Marigold. Below: Gephardt (Sam Worthington)

Costner, of course, had full say in casting, too. He went to British star Sienna Miller to play Frances, a mother who deals with horrendous loss when her family are attacked by Apache raiders. 'I grew up in the 90s. So Kevin Costner to me was God,' says Miller. 'I had two rabbits called Two Socks and Cisco, because *Dances with Wolves* was my favourite film. It was really like, "This is a joke. Kevin Costner wants to talk to [me]?" And he was charming. And he told me about the project and then said, "Will you go west with me?" at the end of it. And I was like, "I'll go to Mars with you."'

Miller calls Costner 'the oracle on this period of history', but she didn't

WARNER BROS. PICTURES

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Horizon tells the story of a new town in Arizona – and the struggle to build new lives

Star/director Kevin Costner (right) with Jamie Campbell Bower as Caleb Sykes

'A LOT OF BEING A WOMAN AT THAT TIME WAS HIDING YOUR STRENGTH'

JENA MALONE

just consult him. From listening to recordings of poet Elizabeth Bishop to inspire the cadence of her character's voice to reading books on pioneer women and inventing a backstory for her character, coming from Massachusetts, Miller built Frances from the ground up, with Costner's help. 'I think he wants women to look at this woman and admire her. And she doesn't ask for sympathy. She's not self-pitying. There's such a strength to her that he was very infatuated with.'

Joining Costner on this epic ride left all the cast thrilled. 'I think when Kevin Costner calls you to be in a western, you realise it's potentially a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity,' says Abbey Lee, an Australian known for *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *The Neon Demon*. 'He's a very powerful man. He's got a very strong presence. And when you're dealing with a set as massive as that, with hundreds of extras, dozens of cars, livestock, cattle, you have to be a very strong leader. And he's got very strong leadership qualities.'

Lee plays Marigold, a prostitute who ultimately ends up with Costner's own character, Hayes Ellison, a taciturn loner who rides into Horizon wise to the ways of the Old West. The actor remembers Zooming with Costner early in the process. 'It was very important to him that all the characters, even though they're enduring such hardship, had a sense of joy, a sense of hope,' she says. 'And he spoke to me a lot about a sense of family that was the central line through the piece. And very much a strong feeling of survival.'

From the early set-piece when Frances' family are attacked, resulting in an apocalyptic fire that she and her daughter barely escape, danger lurks at every corner in Horizon. 'The American West was an unpredictable place,' nods Costner. 'The country was almost like the Garden of Eden. If you think about America 200 years ago, the population that lived there, living in skins… they had no buildings, they lived so lightly on the earth. America was like a frontier that no one had ever even seen.'

That's very much the case when we first glimpse Jena Malone, as her character Lucy unloads rifle ammunition into a man who wrongs her. 'Every human that had to survive that time was strong,' Malone says. 'It just depends on the environment… What were they allowed to show? [Lucy] was a product of vigilance, vigilantes, life-saving apparatuses, so that was all sheer strength, grit, will. But a lot of being a woman at that time was hiding your strengths, hiding your abilities, hiding your capability, which is also a strength in itself.'

The bloodshed of the American Civil War forms a cast-iron backdrop for *Horizon*. 'Guns ruled the day for America,' says Costner. 'While Europe was becoming civilised, the West was about to go to war. And we went to war with the current technology of the time, which were guns. And the guns just spread across America as we took the land. There were 500 nations and we took it and it's a part of our fabric, this idea of guns… It's gotten so sacred to some people… We [now] have a problem with the number of guns that we have in America.'

As Costner speaks in those familiar warm tones, he truly does sound like the oracle when it comes to talking about those that came over from Europe to find the untamed West. 'They got to America. And it was like no place on earth,' he says. 'There was 90 million buffalo. Wagon trains would wait for eight days for

a herd to pass in front of them. Eight days! You wouldn't even wait for a traffic light. But they would wait eight days for fear of what might happen. So it was an unbelievable place.'

With Costner channelling such iconic directors as John Ford (*The Searchers*), *Horizon* feels like traditional Hollywood moviemaking from the Golden Age. In particular, Costner's own performance exudes a Gary Cooper–like charisma. 'There is something extraordinary about the way that Kevin acts that I've never witnessed,' says Lee. 'The moment that he goes from being Kevin to being Hayes, his character, is seamless… There's something very hypnotic, almost, about working with him.'

'THEY GOT TO AMERICA AND IT WAS LIKE NO PLACE ON EARTH'

KEVIN COSTNER

The other prominent male figures in the film include Sergeant Major Riordan (Michael Rooker) and First Lieutenant Trent Gephardt (Sam Worthington) of the United States Army, sent in to protect Horizon. Costner even found room to cast his son Hayes, playing Frances' boy Nate. 'I try not to put my children in parts where I know that there are serious actors that want these parts. I know how much that means… [but] it's mostly because I want to have them close to me. I miss them.'

Costner began shooting in August 2022, finding some of America's most beautiful natural landscapes. 'I love to scout, but it's hard work. And more importantly, all my friends who make movies with me, none of them want to scout with me. Because if I look at a mountain, they'll go, "Oh shit, he wants to go up there!" And I just go a long time to find these locations, to look at places, so it's not CG, so you can imagine what life was like there. I think that's part of the beauty of *Horizon*, where these people lived. The only difference was 200 years ago, they didn't think where they lived was lovely. For them, it was 24 hours just gathering food and protecting themselves.'

Shooting in southern Utah, in particular, was no pushover. 'It was hard,' says Malone. 'And I think even harder on the crew. We're just carrying our embodiment and maybe the few tools or props that we have, but they're carrying carts

As a long-time fan of Kevin Costner, Sienna Miller jumped at the chance to play Frances

Costner saddles up for his epic four-part exploration of 19th-century America

SELF-MADE MOVIES When directors dip into their own pockets…

MEGALOPOLIS (2024)
A film Francis Ford Coppola has dreamed of making since 1977. He spent $120 million of his own moolah on this sci-fi/fantasy set in New Rome. How? By selling off a 'significant piece of his wine empire' in Northern California, a truly ballsy move.

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK (1980)
After the success of 1977's *Star Wars*, creator George Lucas decided to keep creative control of the sequel by funding it independently. The Force was strong as he used the $12 million profits from the original movie.

CLERKS (1994)
Kevin Smith's convenience-store-set debut saw him finance it in all manner of ways, from selling off a large portion of his comic-book collection to maxing out credit cards, borrowing money from his parents and cashing in an insurance cheque.

EL MARIACHI (1992)
Shot in 14 days, Robert Rodriguez's low-fi gunslinger movie cost just over $7,000, with the debut director raising funds partly through volunteering to join an experimental clinical drug trial in Austin, Texas. Thankfully, he lived to tell the tale.

OTHELLO (1951)
Orson Welles' Shakespeare adaptation, in which he starred as the titular Moor, collapsed when the Italian financier went bankrupt. Rather than give up on the project, Welles channelled his own money into the shoot over a stop-start three-year period. **JM**

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The creative team wanted locations that evoke the grandeur of the classical western

of equipment that were not made to be in these kinds of sandstorms and winter and mud. They were the ones making the sacrifices [and enduring] the true hardships. And we were reaping the benefits of being able to experience hardship to be able to step into these roles in a more prepared space.'

The harsh environment wasn't the only painful element faced. Lee recalls being in a corset for the entire shoot. 'It was a genuine corset. And there's no way to lightly wear a corset. You can't breathe as well, your ribcage is being crushed, your stomach hurts. I mean, it just is incredibly uncomfortable. And then you've got what feels like five kilos of skirt hanging from your hips with rope. And I'm riding a horse and I'm having to act and it's fucking boiling hot, or it's freezing cold or whatever. But it just adds to the drudgery of the time.'

Ever the consummate professional, Costner had no complaints. But it begs the question, is he more comfortable in the saddle or the director's chair? 'I direct out on the saddle!' he smirks. 'Sometimes I have to go a hundred yards and sometimes I just tire of walking over there. And I'll just ride over there and talk and then come back. I'm an average rider. I don't consider myself a cowboy. I know those who are great riders. I'm not afraid to do it. I may look like I know how to do it. But I never pretend who I am.'

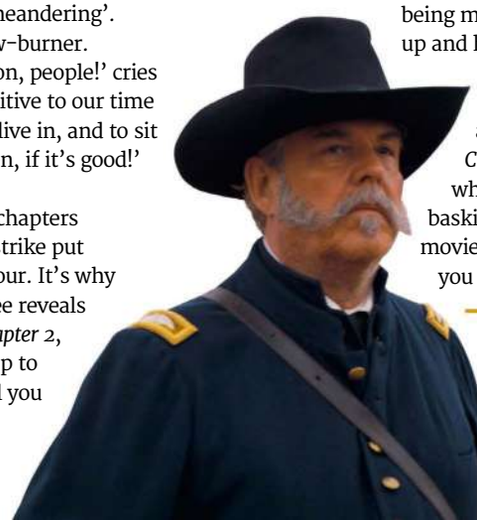
When *Chapter 1* was unveiled in Cannes, it split critics – trade paper *Variety* summing up its disparate parts by calling it 'convoluted, ambitious, intriguing, and meandering'. Running at three hours, it's certainly a slow-burner. 'Everyone's focusing on the length! Come on, people!' cries Miller. 'We live in a culture… we're so sensitive to our time and, actually, attention is the economy we live in, and to sit and be told a story [at that length]… Heaven, if it's good!' Her advice? 'Buckle up.'

Initially, the plan was to shoot the four chapters back-to-back, but last year's SAG-AFTRA strike put paid to the completion of parts three and four. It's why Costner is still teasing out material now. Lee reveals she's got to go back and film scenes for *Chapter 2*, which Costner is still tinkering with right up to the last minute. 'I wish Abbey wouldn't tell you

Working the land: Michael Rooker as Riordan. Below: Costner's *Yellowstone* co-star Danny Huston as Colonel Houghton

shit like that!' he chuckles. 'Yeah… because she's so good, I wanted to continue her story a little bit and I couldn't sleep at night, which also drove people crazy. They'd say, "Kevin, you're done with *Chapter 2*?" No, I'm not. I want to do something with Abbey, too. I can't help it.'

As Miller puts it, 'I have absolute faith in our director. He's like a kid in a toy store with his passion project finally being made.' The script is still evolving, she adds. 'He wakes up and he's like, "Frances… she needs this moment." And it's like gifts that he's bestowing upon her. So it's really a living, breathing entity for him still.' Costner smiles at the thought of where he might end up at the end of *Chapter 4*. 'To an ending that I hope is satisfying. That's what I'm always looking for.' For the moment, he's basking in his achievements. 'I knew *Horizon* was a good movie. For me, on paper. Whether it's a good movie for you on film, that's up to you.'



HORIZON: AN AMERICAN SAGA – CHAPTER 1 OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 28 JUNE. CHAPTER 2 RELEASES ON 16 AUGUST.

TO MAXXXINE

WITH *X* AND *PEARL*, TI WEST CEMENTED HIS PLACE AS ONE OF MODERN CINEMA'S GREAT HORROR FILMMAKERS. NOW HE COMPLETES THE TRILOGY WITH THE EPIC *MAXXXINE*, SET IN 80S LOS ANGELES. *TF* TALKS TO WEST AND STARS MIA GOTH AND ELIZABETH DEBICKI ABOUT FAME, FEMINISM AND THE WISDOM OF INSERTING REAL-LIFE SERIAL KILLER 'THE NIGHT STALKER' INTO THE ACTION...

WORDS: JAMIE GRAHAM

Just over two years ago, Ti West was a filmmaker admired by horror fans but unknown to most mainstream viewers. They'd not had the pleasure of such genre-savvy festival favourites as *The House of the Devil* and *The Innkeepers*, let alone his killer-bat debut *The Roost*. Then, in March 2022, esteemed production company A24 released X, followed just months later by prequel *Pearl*. These films debuted not at horror fests but at South By South West and Venice, and made a combined total of more than $25m at the worldwide box office from budgets of one million apiece.

Since then, *X* and *Pearl* have only grown in stature on the home-media markets, meaning the anticipation for *MaXXXine*, the third part in what West describes as a 'weird trilogy', is huge. Not that the writer-director has had a moment to enjoy his success...

'I'm still so in it,' he tells *Total Film*, pointing to the screen he sits before. 'I'm talking to you in front of the computer I'm editing on. I have three days of sound mixing left, a week of colour corrections. I see the memes and I know a lot of people dress as these characters for Halloween – I'm not ignorant to it, and I'm very happy it's connecting. But through all of that, I've worked 12 hours a day, seven days a week, for three years.'

X, lest you need reminding, followed a band of filmmakers shooting a porno on a Texas farm in 1979. It starred Jenna Ortega, who's since become a Hollywood star, but the lead was an exemplary Mia Goth, playing dual roles: young, would-be porn star Maxine Minx, and Pearl, the octogenarian farm owner who winds up killing everyone but Maxine. Prequel *Pearl* was set on the same farm but in 1918, tracing the titular heroine's first kills as her mind cracks under the duress of an oppressive mother, a sick father, the terrible isolation wrought by the Spanish flu, and her quashed dreams of escaping it all to become a star.

MaXXXine is the sequel to *X*, set in 1985. 'In *X*, Maxine comes out the sole survivor,' says Goth, who's currently cinema's number one scream queen having also starred in Luca Guadagnino's *Suspiria* and Brandon Cronenberg's *Infinity Pool*. Right now she's shooting Guillermo del Toro's *Frankenstein* before moving on to the *Blade* reboot. 'She decides at that moment that nothing is going to get in her way. She has faced death and she realises how precious life is and she just thinks, "Fuck it, I'm going for it", and she drives to Hollywood. When we meet her in Los Angeles, she's created this whole new persona. She knows what she wants and she's going for it.'

What she wants is to graduate from skin flicks. And horror, naturally, is the best route into making legitimate movies. 'Name five celebrities who got their start in horror movies,' Maxine asks a pal in the trailer. 'Jamie Lee Curtis, John Travolta, Demi Moore, Brooke Shields, and...' he fires back, at which point she cuts in: 'Maxine fucking Minx'. [Note: in West's original script, one of those named was Kevin Bacon, who met a famously grisly demise in *Friday the 13th*. It was changed when Bacon signed on to star as a private investigator in *MaXXXine*.]

Director Elizabeth Bender (Elizabeth Debicki) behind the scenes of film-within-the-film *The Puritan II*

Playing director Elizabeth Bender is Elizabeth Debicki (*The Night Manager*, *Tenet*), who arrived on set just days after reprising her role of Princess Diana in Season 6 of *The Crown*. Bender is casting *The Puritan II*, the sequel to, you guessed it, *The Puritan*, which became a cult hit. Maxine auditions for the lead.

'Elizabeth is kind of radical,' smiles Debicki. 'I found her fun to play. She's made B-movies with A-ideas, as she puts it. She uses horror as a Trojan horse. I mean, that's what horror does, and can do for women especially. [The success of *The Puritan*] opened a door in Hollywood but at the same time she loathes Hollywood because she thinks everyone's conventional. She sees herself as an auteur.'

Of course, if you *have* seen West's *The Roost*, you'll likely know that female directors in 1980s horror were practically non-existent. The most famous were Kathryn Bigelow (*Near Dark*) and Mary Lambert (*Pet Sematary*), while Amy Holden Jones made *The Slumber Party Massacre*, Deborah Brock shot *Slumber Party Massacre II*, and Genie Joseph made *Mind Benders*. So is that part of the story – are Elizabeth and Maxine beset by the horrors of patriarchal Hollywood?

'If the industry feels like it has systemic sexism operating nowadays, what they faced was a much higher wall to climb over,' nods Debicki. 'I loved doing that research. They were wicked. I really based it on those women, even in my costume and make-up choices. They were pioneers.'

TRUTH AND DARE

The question about male toxicity coursing through 80s Hollywood is just one of many queries that *Total Film* feels a need to ask about *MaXXXine*. For while certain things are known – West's film will highlight both the glamour and the sleaze of the movie industry; the reign of terror of real-life 80s serial killer Richard Ramirez, aka the Night Stalker, plays out in the background; and West's ambitious film is a Robert Altman-style ensemble piece with 30-plus key roles, some of them occupied by the starry likes of Kevin Bacon (private detective), Giancarlo Esposito (entertainment lawyer), Moses Sumney (working in an adult video store), Lily Collins (actress), Halsey (adult entertainment star) and Bobby Cannavale and Michelle Monaghan (detectives) – there's a great deal that's under wraps. West isn't about to spoil the surprises ('You're the first person I've talked to, so I'm being

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'MAXINE HAS CREATED THIS WHOLE NEW PERSONA. SHE KNOWS WHAT SHE WANTS AND SHE'S GOING FOR IT'

MIA GOTH

a bit cagey'), but he's game enough to face some quickfire interrogation.

TF: Is *MaXXXine* a slasher film?

Ti West: Yeah, it's very much a slasher movie but it's not [one] where four people are in a house and one by one they're getting offed.

TF: *X* aped tropes of 70s horror and *Pearl* held up a cracked mirror to Golden Age Hollywood. Is this a recreation of 80s movies?

TW: It was a blast to play in that high-end 80s B-movie [style], like, everything from a *Terminator*-like aesthetic to *Hardcore* to *Vice Squad* to giallo.

TF: With gnarly FX, like many 80s horror movies?

TW: The movie's more of an action-packed, almost noirish kind of thing, but when it is horror-y, it's as you're describing. It's fun in its prosthetics, its style, its delivery of all the genre stuff.

TF: With hosing blood?

TW: It has its moments, for sure. If you're coming in thinking it's going to be *Dead Alive* [aka *Braindead*], it's not *that* gory. But when it goes, it goes all the way.

TF: The *Psycho* house features in the trailer. A nod to the birth of slasher movies?

TW: It plays a role. In *X*, they have that big conversation about *Psycho* and Hitchcock. *Psycho* is one of the first greats in that [slasher] realm. It's a film that deals with things that this movie also deals with. But I don't want to give it away, why it ends up in there.

TF: And is that Pearl that Maxine glimpses in the window of the Bates house?

TW: That is Pearl. You'll have to see the movie to see why she's there.

What West keeps coming back to is how 'rich' *MaXXXine* is. Not only is it full of 80s music and shot with era-specific lenses and colour gels, it dresses LA's streets in practical period detail rather than VFX. It's also, says West, full of Easter eggs and connective tissue to the first two movies, while plugging into hot themes of the time: Satanic Panic; the rise of a video market overflowing with grindhouse titles; and, of course, the aforementioned Night Stalker, a serial killer who was convicted of 13 counts of murder, five attempted murders and 11 sexual assaults. The inclusion of Richard Ramirez is a clever touch given he was a Texan – a link to the first two movies. But is it tasteless to blend such horrific facts with fiction?

'I think it anchors the movie,' says Goth. 'It sets out a breadcrumb trail back to reality. It's not just some big sweeping horror movie that's purely for entertainment value. It's rooted in something.' She won't reveal if Maxine actually comes into contact with the Night Stalker, and neither will Debicki discuss such matters, saying, 'I won't give anything away. The joy of [the film] is there are so many threads at play.'

West agrees. 'If you go into the movie knowing nothing, everything is possible.' He pauses for an inordinate length of time when asked if he sticks to the facts of the Night Stalker case or perhaps does a Tarantino by reinventing history. 'It has more in common with *Summer of Sam*, the Spike Lee movie [backdropped by the killings of David Berkowitz aka the Son of Sam, in New York during 1976 and 1977], than it does *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*. It does play a significant role in the story but in its own particular way.'

LIFE AFTER DEATH?

In comparison to *X* and *Pearl*, *MaXXXine* is epic, and it's almost sure to make West even more of a mainstream name. He doesn't yet want to entertain such ideas ('I'm just trying to stick the landing!') but admits he has an idea for a fourth film, an 'unexpected departure', if viewers take to this one.

Goth, too, has not yet had her fill, expressing her gratitude for the overlaps between Maxine's life and her own regards breaking into movies, and waving away suggestions that it must be exhausting to harbour such eXXXtreme emotions. 'I enjoy being a big performer. I never do that in my day-to-day life. I'm quite a contained person. Horror movies give you the opportunity to sink your teeth in. I don't want to play second fiddle to a male actor and just be in a reactive position to whatever he's doing. That really is very boring; I would rather just not work.'

So who knows? Perhaps there will be more in this universe, or perhaps there won't. But if *MaXXXine* proves to be it, what a way to go out. 'I'm very proud of the other two movies and I'm very proud of this movie as well,' states West. 'I believe we *have* stuck the landing. To make this trilogy, and to have them [register] in pop culture, in film history… that's a thing that came out of nowhere and now just exists. And as someone who just loves movies, that's an accomplishment I'm very proud of.'

Kevin Bacon, a veteran of 80s slasher movie *Friday the 13th*, stars as a sleazy PI in *MaXXXine*

MAXXXINE OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 5 JULY.

Heist Stakes

TWENTY-TWO YEARS AFTER *THE BOURNE IDENTITY*, MATT DAMON AND DOUG LIMAN REUNITE ON *THE INSTIGATORS*, A *MIDNIGHT RUN*-INSPIRED ACTION COMEDY ABOUT TWO WANNABE CRIMINALS FAILING UPWARDS. *TOTAL FILM* JOINS THE BOURNE-AGAIN DUO, AS WELL AS CO-STARS CASEY AFFLECK AND HONG CHAU, FOR THE HEIST-GONE-WRONG OF THE CENTURY.

WORDS: JORDAN FARLEY

Doug Liman is diligently scouring a brimming set of shelves in his airy New York loft, searching for an important artefact to show *Total Film*. Just as he's about to give up, he finds it – a framed illustration from a May 2002 *Wall Street Journal* story about the chaotic production of the same year's *The Bourne Identity*. The caricatured art depicts the director and Bourne star Matt Damon maniacally pushing the plunger on a detonator in order to blow up a pile of cash, to the horror of an onlooking studio suit.

'The last time I worked with Matt, we were basically kids being yelled at constantly by the authority figures in Hollywood,' Liman says with the grin of a man who has walked through fire and wears the scars with pride. 'I had a moment on *The Instigators* when I was like: "Holy shit, there's no studio boss. This is for Matt and Ben [Affleck]'s company. How did this happen, that we are now the adults in the room?"'

Hailing from Artists Equity, the production company Damon and Affleck set up in November 2022 to give creatives a greater stake in the filmmaking process, *The Instigators* is a two-decades-overdue reunion for Damon and Liman. The pair went in 'different directions' after *Identity*, but had always been looking for the right project to reunite on.

'Doug – unfairly at times – has been labelled as somebody who is too reckless with the budget,' Damon says, speaking to *Total Film* over Zoom from New York, with his fellow Instigator Casey Affleck sitting beside him. 'I don't think there's a stronger signal you can send to the Hollywood community than to say my own salary and Doug's salary are on the line [if we go over budget], because they were on this film. That's how much I trust him and his process.'

Damon calls Liman the 'obvious choice' for the film, in part because of his precise control of tone. An action comedy in the mould of *Midnight Run*, *The Instigators* was originally penned by Chuck MacLean, and rewritten over a two-year period by Casey Affleck, before Damon brought their director on board.

'The way Doug likes to work is to really, in prep, dig into a script; pull it all apart and put it back together a million times,' Affleck explains. 'In fact, the first thing that Doug said on the very first call – I didn't even know him [yet] – was, "The third act just doesn't work." Which is not what you want to hear after two years of trying to make the third act work! And he was right.'

Over a 'three or four month block', Damon, Affleck and MacLean convened at Liman's office 'every day', according to Damon, 'to go through all of the things that might hang us up'. Liman describes this process – collaborative, and with freedom from traditional studio oversight – as 'closer to *Swingers* than anything I've done since. *Swingers* was a bunch of us in my garage figuring out how to make a movie, and here it was a bunch of us sitting in my office figuring out how to make a movie.'

'It didn't feel like there was any executives coming in and checking in on us, or that Doug was getting notes from anybody,' claims Hong Chau, who previously starred alongside Damon in 2017's *Downsizing*. 'It just felt very relaxed.' As a result of this process, *The Instigators* that went in front of cameras ended up being 'a whole new movie from where it started', according to Affleck. 'And Doug leaves room,' adds Damon. 'So if something is happening that's better than the plan, then we do that.'

ART OF THE STEAL

Set in their native Boston, *The Instigators* sees Damon and Affleck play Rory and Cobby. Rory is in therapy with Dr. Rivera (Chau) and in desperate need of money for child support. Together with Cobby – an alcoholic misanthrope who rubs everyone up the wrong way – they accept a job from a local gangster (Michael Stuhlbarg) to steal donation money from the city's corrupt mayor (Ron Perlman) on election night. But, as Liman puts it, 'You can't imagine two people less qualified to survive a heist and the manhunt that ensues.'

Buckle up: stars Hong Chau, Casey Affleck and Matt Damon

The cast also includes Alfred Molina (back) and Michael Stuhlbarg (right)

Having established Damon as the prototypical modern action hero – unflappable and hyper-capable – in *The Bourne Identity*, Liman and the star went in the opposite direction entirely with Rory. Albeit, after some initial hurdles. 'When Matt brought me the script, the first thing I recognised was, this was clearly developed by, and for, Casey Affleck,' a never-not-frank Liman states. 'I said, "Matt, your character is kind of not there." And he goes, "Yeah, no shit! That's why I'm bringing it to you."'

'But I'm so proud of Rory,' Liman continues. 'Because it's such an unusual character to see in a heist film.' The director equates Rory's approach to pulling off a heist to that of a carpenter ('methodical, boring'), while Damon explains that Rory proceeds logically, with no ability to improvise, unlike the endlessly adaptable Jason Bourne. 'He has absolutely no experience or idea what he's doing,' Damon says with a familiar chuckle. 'He's taking notes. He wants to do a good job. But he starts to suspect that other people don't have such great ideas either. So as the movie progresses, he becomes more assertive.'

If, as Liman describes, *The Instigators* is 'the *Bad News Bears* of heist movies' then Cobby is a counterpart for Walter Matthau's irreverent coach in that 1976 baseball comedy, Morris Buttermaker – nominally in charge, but hardly in control. Memorably introduced tricking a kid into unlocking his motorbike by blowing into

APPLE

'YOU CAN'T IMAGINE TWO PEOPLE LESS QUALIFIED TO SURVIVE A HEIST AND THE MANHUNT THAT ENSUES'

DOUG LIMAN

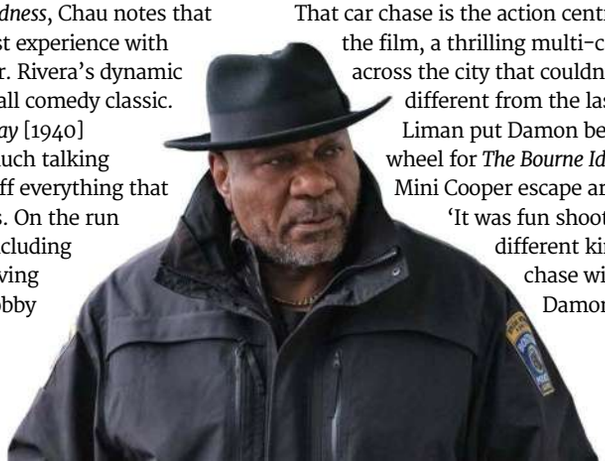
a breathalyser lock ('It's one of the best introductions to a character,' Damon grins), Cobby is an unlikeable anti-hero you grow to love. 'I wanted him to be someone who really wants these people to like him,' says Affleck. 'But he will say things very directly. Abrasive is one way of looking at it… Once he finds out that Hong's character is a therapist, he decides that he wants a therapist, too.'

WHAT'S UP, DOC?

Speaking to *Total Film* ahead of a busy summer that also includes multiple roles in Yorgos Lanthimos' *Kinds of Kindness*, Chau notes that *The Instigators* is her first experience with action, but compares Dr. Rivera's dynamic with Cobby to a screwball comedy classic. 'I liken it to *His Girl Friday* [1940] where Cobby does so much talking and Rivera's swatting off everything that he says,' Chau chuckles. On the run from the authorities, including Ving Rhames' tank-driving super-cop, Rory and Cobby turn to Rivera for help.

'Rivera has to make one of the toughest character choices I've ever had a character do on screen, which is the decision to get into that car with her patient for the car chase,' Liman says, referring to a sequence in which Rivera willingly becomes a 'hostage' of Rory and Cobby's, so the police don't shoot on sight. 'And once she makes this bad decision, she actively is trying to do therapy for both of them the entire time,' adds Damon. 'She's trying to get them to come to the conclusion that they need to just turn themselves in – that [running] is completely ridiculous.'

That car chase is the action centrepiece of the film, a thrilling multi-car pursuit across the city that couldn't be more different from the last time Liman put Damon behind the wheel for *The Bourne Identity*'s Mini Cooper escape around Paris. 'It was fun shooting a different kind of car chase with him,' Damon says.



'Jason Bourne knows exactly what he's doing, and where he's going at all times. And obviously Rory is the opposite.'

Much of the sequence was shot at speed on the streets of Boston and the suburb of Quincy, with the interiors captured on a gimbal on stage – mercifully for Chau, who notes, 'I get carsick very easily!' According to Liman, when it came to closing busy Boston roads for filming, 'it helps when you have Matt Damon and Ben Affleck, who can approach the governor and the mayor. They were willing to open the city to us in a way that they might not for other filmmakers, and we took advantage of that.'

STREAM TEAM

Boasting notably accomplished support – Alfred Molina, Toby Jones, Paul Walter Hauser and Jack Harlow also feature – Damon believes the high-calibre cast 'is a testament to Doug and the script'. For Liman, 2024 is proving to be his busiest in recent memory with *The Instigators* set to release just over three months after his *Road House* redo became a streaming hit. The two films 'were basically shot right on top of each other' and 'edited together', but back in March Liman chose not to support the release of *Road House*, decrying Amazon's streaming-only release strategy. While *The Instigators* will get a limited theatrical release, it too will live on a streaming platform – Apple TV+ – so why the change of heart?

'*Road House* was conceived of for the theatres,' Liman claims. 'I was really talking about the disrespect Amazon was showing towards the filmmakers. *The Instigators* was conceived of for Apple. The contracts all say it's for streaming – from the beginning. When we were shooting the movie, I was like, "I'm going to make the biggest fricking movie I can make that also has the intimacy that will make it work on a smaller screen as well." It was the bait and switch that Amazon did to us on *Road House* that, for me, was unacceptable.'

As with Bourne, it's entirely likely, though unconfirmed, that Liman won't return to direct the recently announced *Road House* sequel given this very public falling-out. But audience demand to return to the worlds and characters he puts on screen – 'chaotic' productions or not – will always be the clearest measure of success for Liman.

'I do think there's probably no better compliment to a movie than people wanting for there to be a sequel,' he says with a smile. '*Road House* – there's call for a sequel. *Edge of Tomorrow*, there's no better compliment than Warner Bros. constantly bringing up, "Will you go and make another one of these?" And I'm hoping with *The Instigators* there will be a call for a sequel as well.'

THE INSTIGATORS RELEASES IN SELECT CINEMAS AND STREAMS ON APPLE TV+ FROM 9 AUGUST.

THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT AT 25

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO, *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT* TERRIFIED EVERYONE – INCLUDING ITS CO-DIRECTOR, EDUARDO SÁNCHEZ. THE MONSTER HIT CONTINUES TO CAST A LONG SHADOW OVER HIS CAREER, AS HE DIVES DEEP ON HIS FOUND-FOOTAGE TRAILBLAZER, PASSING ON J.J. ABRAMS AND HOW HE FINALLY FREED HIMSELF FROM ITS 'CURSE'.

WORDS SAB ASTLEY

In 1999, *The Blair Witch Project* scared the world. 'It was so profoundly terrifying that I didn't watch it again for another decade,' *Host* director Rob Savage remembers. Co-directed by duo Eduardo Sánchez and Daniel Myrick, who met during university, it signalled the arrival of an untapped style of genre filmmaking and shocked *[Rec]* co-director Jaume Balagueró 'because it was a completely new approach to horror'.

The faux-doc horror follows a filmmaking trio who venture into Maryland's Black Hills Forest in pursuit of the mysterious 'Blair Witch'; only their tapes are ever recovered. 'I just remember it was all anybody wanted to talk about for, like, two weeks straight,' *Deadstream* co-director Vanessa Winter recalls. But no one was more terrified of the movie than co-director Eduardo Sánchez: 'How do you follow *The Blair Witch Project*?'

Although Sánchez grew up on a diet of classic 70s horror, it was the pseudo-documentary shows *In Search of...* (hosted by Leonard Nimoy) and *Unsolved Mysteries* that truly got under his skin. But before *Cannibal Holocaust*, even before *COPS*, Sánchez's number one inspiration for found footage? Bigfoot. 'For me and Dan, the Patterson-Gimlin film was the impetus for us to get into found footage. That film was the creepiest thing we'd ever seen.' These cinema-verité documentarians, alongside Sánchez's lifelong uneasiness around the deep wood, inspired the stew of ideas for what would eventually become *The Blair Witch Project*.

In *The Blair Witch Project* a lingering malevolence hangs over the film. Even as Sánchez cranks up the horror, there's a purposeful ambiguity and control – something he learned from Spielberg. 'In *Jaws*, you feel its presence from the beginning – but you need to tease the shark. It's everything else that warns you of the danger, like John Williams' score.' The next time you watch *The Blair Witch Project*, close your eyes for a moment and just listen. Every sound is purposeful – a mandate from the directors that everything the audience can see and hear be authentic to the woodland setting. That is, apart from the unsettling sounds of children distantly playing through a boom box (recorded by Sánchez's mother) and the sinister effigies of sticks and stones scattered around. 'The iconography of the weird things in the woods – still so iconic, and still so scary,' *Watcher* director Chloe Okuno tells *TF*.

The Blair Witch Project opens with interspersed interviews featuring Burkittsville locals, their seductive naturalism a clever ploy from Sánchez and Myrick that immediately cements the authenticity of its world. 'The interviews are a big part for me – you start to believe you're interacting with real people. It's super-brilliant,' Winter says. The actual shoot only took eight days in total, with over 20 hours of footage shot entirely by the trio of actors Heather Donahue, Michael C. Williams and Joshua Leonard – Donahue had never even operated a camera before working on the

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Heather Donahue had never operated a camera before

film. 'You definitely couldn't shoot the actors for the full 24 hours like we did back then any more,' Sánchez notes. To create a sense of isolating immersion, the pair directed from afar, leaving clues in milk crates the trio had to find using their GPS, only interacting with them directly during nightfall, to keep them from sleeping.

For Radio Silence duo Matt Bettinelli-Olpin and Tyler Gillett (*Scream*, *Abigail*), that immersive direction creates the film's magic: 'You have these wildly visceral performances that would hold up in any style of movie; they just happen to exist in this very lo-fi, handheld film,' Gillett says. That, coupled with the deliberately unprofessional and grainy nature of Heather's video footage, hammers home the upsetting authenticity that found footage can achieve. 'That's the haunting promise of found footage – the less you know, the more it grows. Found footage lives or dies by that mantra,' Sánchez maintains.

GOING VIRAL

Although production ended, the world-building did not. A year before the film's release, Sánchez and crew set up a website documenting the disappearance of the 'real' filmmakers, including police evidence, crime-scene photos and extracts of Heather's bloodied and aged diary. 'It's very exciting because it's all based on other things that aren't in the movie but have their own personality. That's very powerful,' Balagueró remembers. This internet-led storytelling approach was groundbreaking at the time and was the key to *Blair Witch*'s phenomenon status. Sánchez remembers Jeff Johnsen, a champion of *The Blair Witch Project*, even appearing on an LA morning talk show and going through the website to explain it all. 'The traffic for the website blew up that same month,' the director says.

The shoot only took eight days in total

Sánchez's idea for the website came from his love of Lucasfilm's *Shadows of the Empire*, which used other forms of media – including a book, comics and a videogame – to create a story set between *Episodes V* and *VI*. 'I loved this concept, that it wasn't even centred around a movie. You had this whole universe centred around just an idea that kept expanding.' This ambitious storytelling is something Sánchez has utilised throughout his career, from 150-page story bibles on sci-fi thriller *Altered* to whole transmedia shooting units on *Lovely Molly*.

'IT WAS SUCH A CULTURAL MOMENT – IT ANTICIPATED SO MUCH OF WHAT IS POPULAR NOW'
CHLOE OKUNO

After previewing snippets of footage at smaller festivals to gauge reactions, the film premiered at Sundance in January 1999, with Park City blanketed by 'missing person' posters featuring the cast. Indie distributor Artisan Entertainment picked up the film, another key moment for *The Blair Witch Project*. 'I don't think *Blair Witch* would've been handled the same way by any other company,' says Sánchez. Artisan, however, wanted to change the unforgettably unsettling ending in which Heather discovers Michael in the basement, facing the corner, but ultimately the directors won out. 'The middle, that ambiguity, is where fear truly lies.'

The film opened in just 27 cinemas on 14 July 1999 and made $1.5 million, scaring off *Eyes Wide Shut* with a per-cinema average more than six times that of Kubrick's highly publicised erotic thriller. Bettinelli-Olpin and Gillett remember being in packed cinemas and dorm rooms, transfixed: 'It just felt like there was something different and magic happening that was wildly unique,' says Bettinelli-Olpin. When the film went nationwide two weeks later, it made $29.2 million. By the time it ended its theatrical run, it became the 10th highest-grossing film in the US that year, beating *Notting Hill*, *Stuart Little* and even *The World is Not Enough* in the US, and taking in $250 million worldwide. 'It was such a cultural moment, it really anticipated so much of what is popular now,' Okuno recollects.

The Blair Witch Project seemed to electrify everyone who came into contact with it – except Sánchez and Myrick. 'I think due to the pressures of having such a success, and also the pressures of being a duo, co-directing and essentially co-birthing this movie together, my relationship with Dan started to break down.' Sánchez even remembers a time when a former agent asked him which one of them actually had the filmmaking talent. Artisan wanted to capitalise on the phenomenon, but Sánchez and Myrick's desire not to be pigeon-holed as the 'found-footage guys', alongside their eroding relationship, made them decline a follow-up. 'Honestly, we would have probably signed on, but they had a release date before they even had an idea,' the director says. 'Everyone knows it's not a good idea to set a release date and *then* come up with a movie.'

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The film took $250 million worldwide

Joshua Leonard and Michael C. Williams

LOST AND FOUND

The Blair Witch… led to a lot of other projects being offered the duo's way, including the chance to helm the J.J. Abrams-penned 2001 horror-thriller *Joy Ride*. 'We went down the road a little bit,' Sánchez says. 'I liked it but Dan didn't, so we passed.' Abrams would eventually go on to create his own found-footage monster hit *Cloverfield* with Matt Reeves in 2008, which Sánchez humbly cites as the true galvanisation moment for found footage: 'It opened the door for everything, and it's been really exciting to see the evolution of found-footage movies since.'

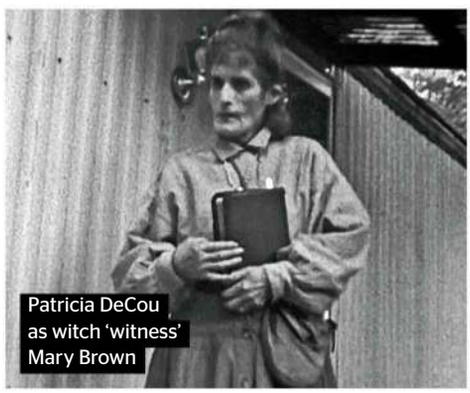
Of all the early 2000s horror movies released, Sánchez believes he read '90%' of the scripts, and had offers to direct a quarter of them. But with a lack of a clear mentor, the difficulty of convincing two filmmakers to unite on one project, and the pressure of following up one of the most successful independent films of all time, Sánchez stepped away from filmmaking entirely. 'Honestly, I was scared. I felt like I didn't know how to handle a big movie.'

Sánchez retired from filmmaking for six years until sci-fi thriller *Altered*, in which a motley crew seek revenge on the alien that killed their friend. Despite a huge blow from a change in *Altered*'s release plans due to executive departures at the distributor, Sánchez powered on, his filmmaking desire rekindled. He flirted with found footage on *Lovely Molly* before finally returning in full to the style with Bigfoot creature feature *Exists* and *V/H/S 2* short *A Ride in the Park*. 'It was just so fun to get back into it, see how we could update it and have fun with it. We loved seeing how people had evolved the style, and that the emphasis was on scaring the crap out of you instead of convincing you it was real.'

The movie brought 'found footage' into mainstream cinema

Sánchez is even developing a new project he describes as 'our own new version of found footage', noting that – as with *The Blair Witch Project* – he's experimenting as much as possible. Found footage has now come so far since 1999, with many directors having evolved the style bit by bit – what does the future of found footage look like to them?

'The playground is bigger and the technology is more accessible than ever. What I've always loved about found footage is it's not story-based, it's style-based,' says Sánchez. This foundation of style is why Bettinelli-Olpin and Gillett boarded the V/H/S franchise as producers: 'There's the opportunity for new voices to emerge and go, "Oh, that's a good point of view I haven't seen before",' says Bettinelli-Olpin. Chloe Okuno agrees that opportunities like the V/H/S franchise open doors for aspiring filmmakers. 'It's such a good way to allow them to deliver something that's like their pure vision.'


Patricia DeCou as witch 'witness' Mary Brown

The distributors initially wanted to change the ending

This accessibility alongside a now near-endless stream of footage is something Rob Savage believes is the key to its evolution. 'There's an opportunity to do what *Blair Witch* did in the 90s now with live streaming and the way we digest stories.' The internet's growing prevalence in found-footage stories – *Spree*, *Dashcam* and *Deadstream* being recent examples – suggest perhaps footage is no longer found, but lived. 'The genre is remaking itself, there's this consideration of what other levels we can take in terms of scares and entertainment,' Winter adds.

Recently, Blumhouse announced their own plans to resurrect *The Blair Witch Project*, hoping to scare a whole new generation of moviegoers with a brand-new take on the horror. The question is, how do you improve a film many believe was perfect the first time round? 'It's one of those definitive of-an-era movies,' Gillett says. 'There's a simplicity that will never be matched,' Savage adds. What does Sánchez make of his film's legacy? 'Man, just the possibility these talented filmmakers were even slightly inspired – it's just really fun to see where it's gone and where it's continuing to go.'

THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT IS AVAILABLE ON BLU-RAY, DVD AND DIGITAL.

ALAMY, ADOBE

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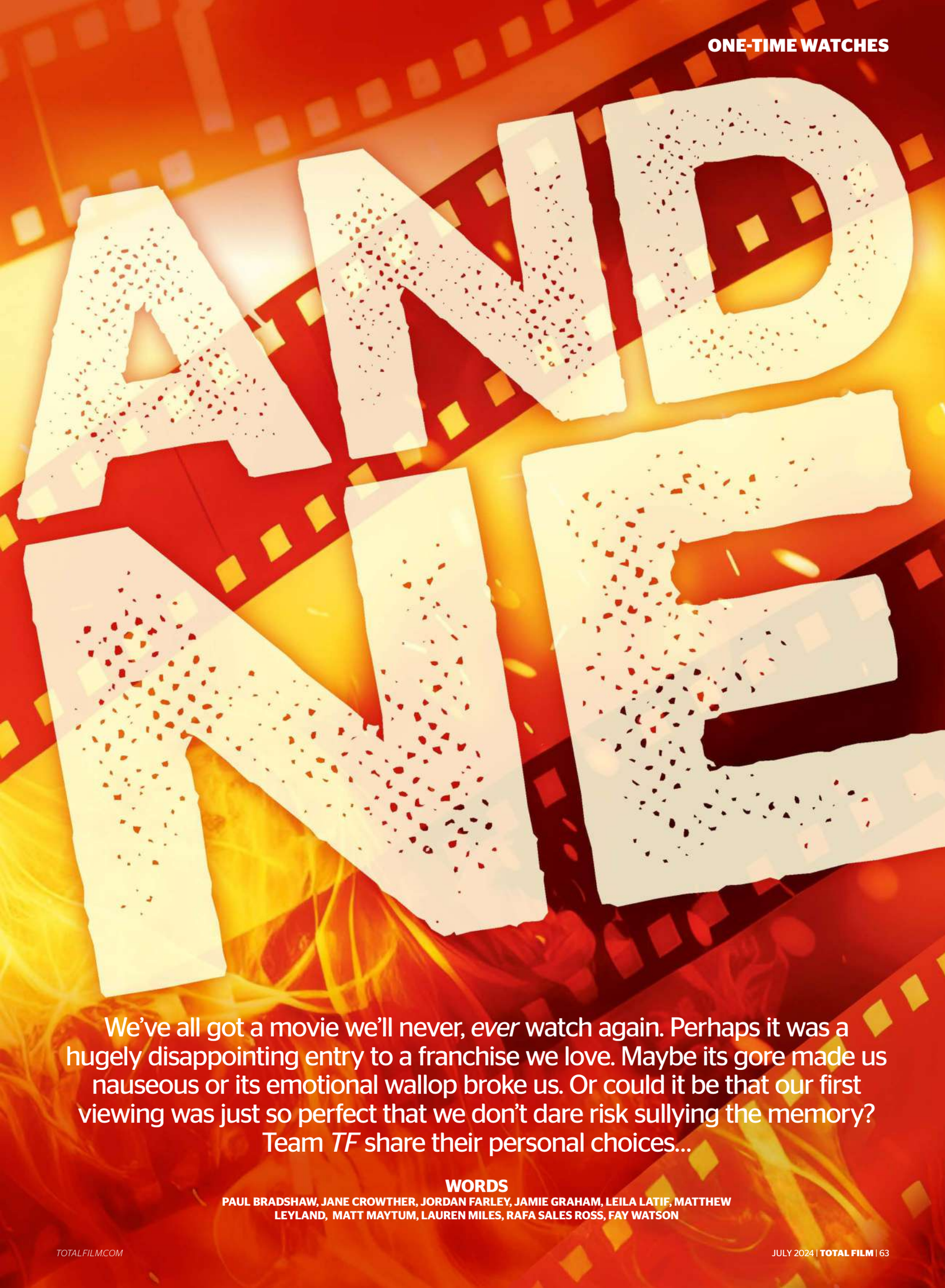


AND

We've all got a movie we'll never, *ever* watch again. Perhaps it was a hugely disappointing entry to a franchise we love. Maybe its gore made us nauseous or its emotional wallop broke us. Or could it be that our first viewing was just so perfect that we don't dare risk sullying the memory? Team *TF* share their personal choices...

WORDS
PAUL BRADSHAW, JANE CROWTHER, JORDAN FARLEY, JAMIE GRAHAM, LEILA LATIF, MATTHEW LEYLAND, MATT MAYTUM, LAUREN MILES, RAFA SALES ROSS, FAY WATSON

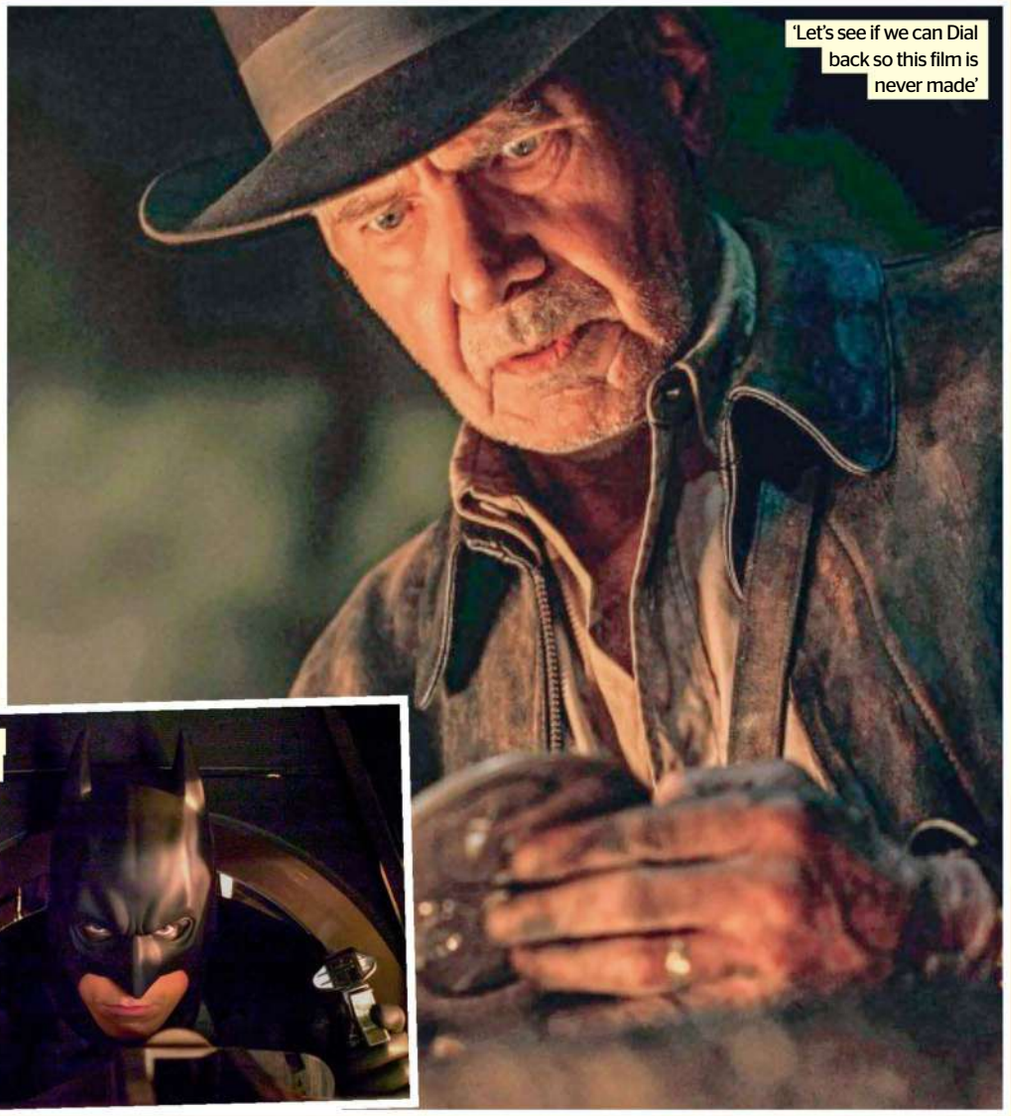
INDIANA JONES AND THE DIAL OF DESTINY (2023)

MATTHEW LEYLAND
REVIEWS EDITOR

As *Scary Movie 3* so sagely reminded us, 'Great trilogies come in threes.' They don't need a half-hearted part four. And they definitely don't need a part five that tries to relive past glories (that messy, overextended prologue) but ends up reminding us of Bill & Ted instead (that silly, overreaching climax).

And so I like to pretend that Indy's journey ended with the ride into the sunset that perfectly capped *Last Crusade*. It's not that I don't want to see my heroes get old; I just don't want to see them get crap. *Dial of Destiny* is a dud that adds nothing to the lore, nothing we haven't seen before. Juvenile sidekick? Done, but with an actual arc. Youthful flashback? Done, with none of the tech and a million times the charm. Nazis? Like Indy, I hate those guys... but there's little to fear from these disorganised losers. As for the umpteenth reunion with Marion, at least *Crystal Skull* didn't reduce Karen Allen to a groceries-lugging Easter egg.

Seriously, gimme that stupid Dial right now; there's 154 minutes of my life I'd like to erase.

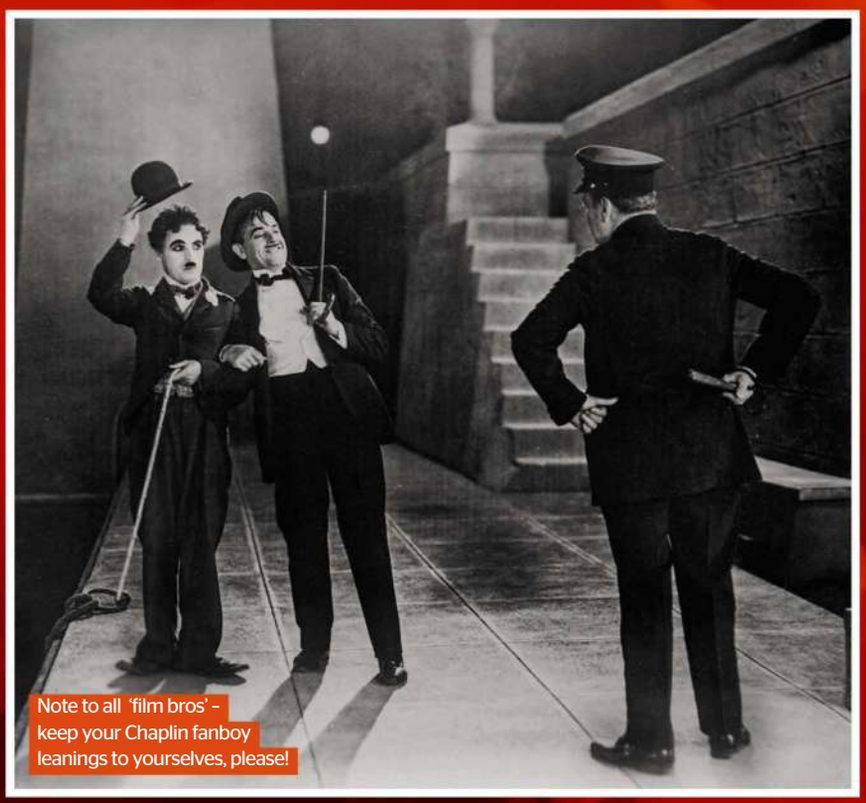


'Let's see if we can Dial back so this film is never made'

Batman Begins: (Bat)suited and (re)booted

SECOND OPINION

Upon first viewing *Batman Begins*, I was like, 'Get in the Batsuit already!' Second viewing: 'I never said thank you, Mr Nolan...'



Note to all 'film bros' – keep your Chaplin fanboy leanings to yourselves, please!

CITY LIGHTS (1931)

LEILA LATIF
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

I'm still in disbelief that I once dated an odious 'film bro' who wanted to educate me about cinema, even though my grandfather had introduced me to Hitchcock, Chahine and Miyazaki before I could read. Film Bro would scoff at my favourite choices, and whenever I suggested a horror movie or a musical, his eyes would roll like I'd just suggested watching CBeebies. But sadly, he did introduce me to Chaplin's *City Lights*. So much as I can appreciate that Chaplin is probably a genius, I'm just going to have to take everyone's word for it, as the experience of watching him is so sullied by the memory of feeling more simpleton than cinephile that I've been firmly Team Buster Keaton ever since. What's more, I can't bring myself to revisit – just the sight of a bowler hat and a cane brings a chill, though a slight smugness quickly follows: the gal who couldn't be trusted to pick out a DVD is now a bona fide film critic and contributing editor to *Total Film*!

SECOND OPINION

Stephen King correctly pointed out that Kubrick's adaptation of *The Shining* misses both the book's heart and its very point, but I've recently conceded the film is its own excellent beast.

The Shining: twin peak

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AMERICAN HONEY (2016)

JORDAN FARLEY
DEPUTY EDITOR

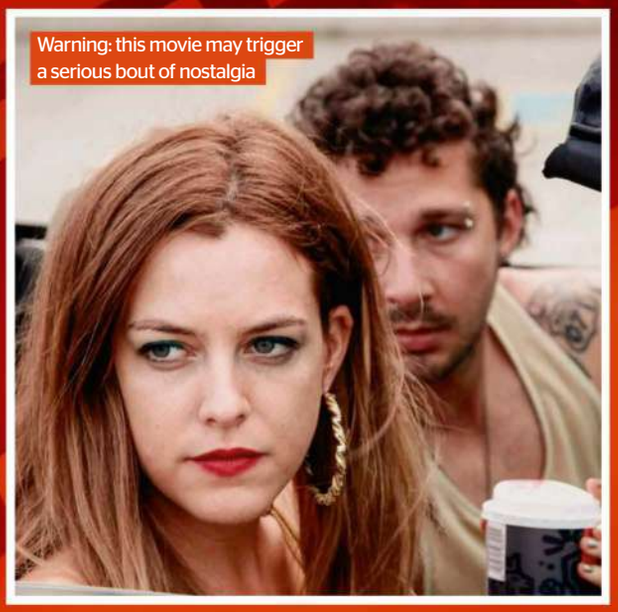
There are innumerable movies I've never had the stomach to revisit (*Irréversible*, *Martyrs* and the soul-shattering *Hachi: A Dog's Tale*, for example), but there's one viewing experience I'd like to preserve in amber for a different reason. Back in May 2016, I caught Andrea Arnold's heady Middle America road movie *American Honey* at Cannes. One of the best things about film festivals is you have the rare opportunity to watch films with zero preconceptions – often you know little more than the filmmakers involved. And so it was with *American Honey*, a film I went into blind and walked out of with eyes and heart wide open.

The sheer euphoria of Shia LaBeouf's braced, rat-tailed Jake dancing atop a supermarket checkout to the beats of undeniable Rihanna bop *We Found Love* has never left me, even as the finer details of Arnold's near-three-hour hangout movie about peripatetic young people falling in love and selling magazines(!) have faded. Spilling out onto the Croisette after, *TF*'s own Jamie Graham and I raved about its Proustian ability to surface lost memories of youth, just as I was leaving my 20s behind. A rewatch would only risk ruining perfection.

Top Gun: top cheese

SECOND OPINION

As a kid, I thought *Top Gun* was the height of cool. Revisiting ahead of *Maverick*, the '80s cheese wore thin.



Warning: this movie may trigger a serious bout of nostalgia

Kurt Russell prepares for a 'shockingly violent' final 10

BONE TOMAHAWK (2015)

LAUREN MILES
NEWS EDITOR

I recently watched S. Craig Zahler's debut *Bone Tomahawk*, and while it's an incredibly atmospheric western (led brilliantly by Kurt Russell), it's a film I don't think I'll ever want to revisit. The plot promises a typical Cowboys vs 'Indians' showdown, with the men of the town of Bright Hope (David Arquette and Patrick Wilson among them) hunting down the native tribe that have terrorised them and taken hostages. But what it turns out to be is a tale of survival that bears unblinking witness to the brutality one can face at the hand of the wilderness. The final 10 minutes are shockingly violent, and while that leaves a lasting impression, it doesn't leave a desire to experience its cold viciousness again anytime soon.

SECOND OPINION

We were starved of blockbusters during the pandemic, and as a result I thought that the Emily Blunt and Dwayne Johnson-starring adventure flick *Jungle Cruise* (2021) was much more entertaining than it probably is. A second watch revealed the extent of the dodgy special effects and how much it borrows from other, better movies.

Jungle Cruise: lockdown lamo

WEST SIDE STORY (2021)

MATT MAYTUM
EDITOR

As a critic, revisiting films can be fraught with anxiety. With your opinion permanently etched in stone, you've got a vested interest in not changing your mind. That's why I can never rewatch Spielberg's take on the famed musical. Not because I hated it: I found it fine if underwhelming, which I tried to capture in my three-star review. To me it was 'impressively put together', but 'never entirely justifies its existence', with Ansel Elgort supplying a bum note. Then the review embargo lifted and my three-star faint-praise-damning was one of a rarefied group that weren't outright five-star raves. As a critic, you've got to write from the heart: no good can come from writing what you think others want to read. Still, it's chilly when you have your ass in the wind, critically speaking, while all others proclaim it a late-career masterpiece. The audience apathy towards the film at the box office was some consolation, but I won't be watching it again, just in case I love it. When you're a Jet critic, you're a Jet critic all the way.

Little Women: 'hefty' and heartfelt

SECOND OPINION

It took two viewings of Greta Gerwig's *Little Women* for me to appreciate it as the clockwork-precise, emotionally hefty adaptation that it is.

Universally loved... well, maybe not by *everyone*

ALAMY, ADOBE

MARLEY & ME (2008)

JANE CROWTHER
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

As a kid I was removed from the cinema for bawling so loudly at E.T. dying that I disturbed other patrons. Since then it's been a risk to take me to a sad film, especially one involving animals: *Watership Down*, *Ring of Bright Water* and *The NeverEnding Story* scarred me early; in adulthood, *Dances with Wolves*' Two Socks and *Hachi: A Dog's Tale*'s loyal hound turned me lachrymose. But *Marley & Me* was the one that really did it, opening a well, unravelling me, and prompting *really* ugly crying. Lured in by a peppy trailer (family pooch creates havoc!), the lump in the throat started when mature Marley began to falter on his walk, ushering in anticipatory tears as he got poorly. And by the time his owner (Owen Wilson) had to make the decision no pet owner ever wants to, I was a snotty, snivelling mess. Marley cradling his fluffy teddy toy and casting defeated, wise eyes at Wilson as he told him he was 'a GREAT dog' – I can *never* see again.

'Harmless festive fun'? Er, no – actually

SECOND OPINION

I saw *Love Actually* and thought it was a harmless bit of festive fun. Saw it again and hated Andrew Lincoln's stalker, the casual misogyny, the fat-shaming, the treatment of Dame Emma Thompson.

Hound of love: this film could reduce you to a 'snotty, snivelling mess'

Hell hath no fury... like Tom Hardy strapped to a car, heading into battle

MAD MAX: FURY ROAD (2015)

JAMIE GRAHAM
EDITOR-AT-LARGE

A week before *Fury Road* was due to make its world premiere at the Cannes Film Festival, I was one of three UK journalists who snuck into a Soho screening room for a top-secret peek at George Miller's fourth Mad Max movie. Obviously I hoped it would be awesome, but I kind of expected it would be decent at best: it was the first Max movie in 30 years; the last one, *Beyond Thunderdome*, had fallen well short of the first two; and the Max I grew up with, Mel Gibson, had been replaced by Tom Hardy, which was kind of like having Channing Tatum step into Clint's tan boots as The Man with No Name.

What I witnessed raised the bar on action cinema... and then the Pole Cats vaulted over it. Stumbling out of the screening room, I was so awestruck that I've never dared look at the film again (certainly not on a TV screen) for fear it will shrink the experience. Why risk tarnishing such a lovely day?

Airplane!: 'dented by spoof fatigue'

SECOND OPINION

I rewatched *Airplane!* last month. Used to consider it one of the greatest comedies. Now dented by spoof fatigue and changing values.

BURIED (2010)

FAY WATSON
ENTERTAINMENT WRITER

'I've never been happier to finish a movie,' Ryan Reynolds said about filming 2010's *Buried*, and I can relate. Some cinema experiences stick in your mind for all the wrong reasons, and watching Rodrigo Cortés' claustrophobic thriller in my local multiplex is that film for me.

The premise is pretty simple: Reynolds' Paul Conroy has been buried alive beneath the surface of the Iraqi desert with a few items including a BlackBerry, a lighter and a pocket knife. For the entirety of the film, the camera sticks with him in that tiny box as he tries to work out what is happening before the coffin is filled with sand. Squirming yet?

Over a decade later I'd still rank those 95 minutes as some of the most stressful viewing of my life as I watched a man navigate through the trauma of slowly dying. I was a wreck by the credits and half-wished I'd walked out during the film's pitch-black opening sequence – several did. Even now, the thought of it makes me uneasy... Can someone open a window?

Joker: ace-high

SECOND OPINION

I initially considered Todd Phillips' *Joker* indulgent and not as clever as it thinks. Now it feels ahead of its time in a genre that's got increasingly repetitive.

Ryan Reynolds ponders how Wrexham will fare while he's entombed

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A.I. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (2001)

PAUL BRADSHAW
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

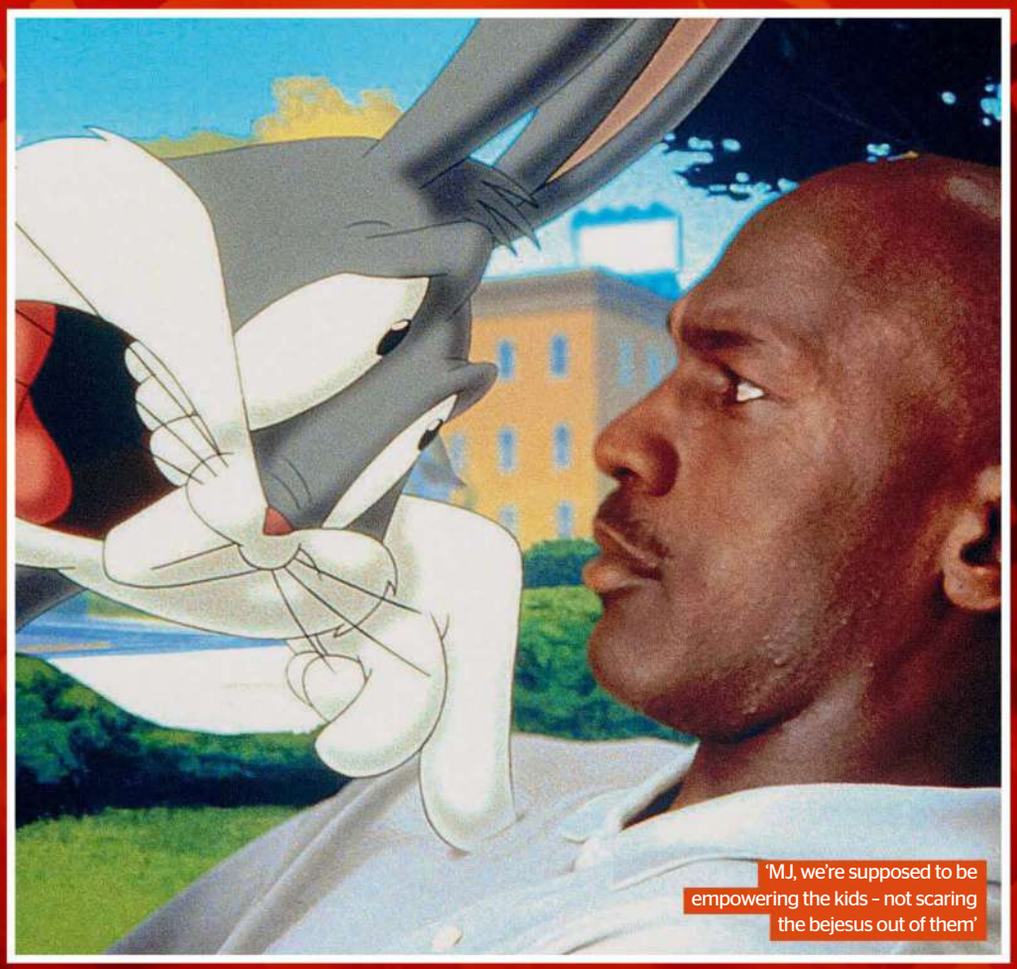
A few years ago I replaced my old DVD of *A.I.* with a new special edition Blu-ray. I haven't watched it yet, and I never will. The truth is, I never watched the DVD either, and I haven't seen the film at all since the summer of 2001 when I went to the cinema on opening night and fell deeply in love with Spielberg's dark sci-fi Pinocchio story. I also felt something else – something profoundly frightening and sad. It filled me with an emptiness; a sense of inevitable, crushing, looming loss that moved me enough to never want to get anywhere near it again. Worse still, though, is the idea of rewatching it and maybe not feeling the same way. Forging a connection like that with a film or a book or any work of art – however disturbing – is a rare and wonderful thing, and I wouldn't want to lose it. I'll never not own a copy of *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*, and I'll also never watch it.

'AI? I think this might catch on in a few years' time...'

The 'most fun' part of the trilogy? Even Doc was surprised to hear that one

SECOND OPINION

I always skipped *Back to the Future Part III* (while endlessly rewatching the first two) until I gave it another chance last Christmas. Turns out I was missing out on the most fun part of the whole trilogy.



'M.J, we're supposed to be empowering the kids – not scaring the bejesus out of them'

ALAMY, ADOBE

SPACE JAM (1996)

RAFA SALES ROSS
CONTRIBUTOR

When kids crawl into their parents' beds at night to soothe a nightmare, it can be because they've caught a peek of a forbidden film. Think grisly, blood-soaked slashers and menacing killer puppets. Not me, though. I spent a year of my childhood knocking on my dad's bedroom door because I couldn't shake the image of a planet where aliens were concocting an evil plan to get rid of some of the world's finest basketball players.

It's actually not hard to see why a highly impressionable kid would be terrified of Joe Pytka's sports comedy. Conniving aliens who can quintuple in size and cruelty to defeat our beloved Looney Tunes and their human companions are a legitimate threat, and now, as an adult, I'm just as charmed by this curious story of mine as I was once petrified of the film itself. In order to preserve the sweet innocence of that memory, I'll keep my distance from Michael Jordan and co.

SECOND OPINION

As a kid, I was obsessed with *Powder*, in particular the imagery of an albino man running towards an open field hoping to be struck by lightning. Now the only thing that strikes me is how in the world did this get made?

Powder: less 'pow', more 'duh'

INTERVIEW MATT MAYTUM

‘I SPECIFICALLY LOOK FOR ROLES THAT ARE NOT LIKE MY LIFE’

NATALIE PORTMAN

Natalie Portman has already amassed a three-decade body of work that includes awards glory, billion-dollar blockbusters and searing character work, but don’t expect her to rest on her laurels. She tells *Total Film* about starring in and producing *Lady in the Lake*, the Apple TV+ series that provides the latest complex showcase for her work, and the path that’s led her here.

PORTRAITS PAMELA HANSON

PAMELA HANSON/TRUNK ARCHIVE

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It's May 2024, and Natalie Portman is speaking to *Total Film* having wrapped another day's shoot in London on Guy Ritchie's globe-trotting adventure, *Fountain of Youth*. If it feels like an unexpected choice, well, that's to be expected from Portman, whose career has defied expectations since she began working as a child. Straight out of the gate, it was early roles in adult fare like *Leon* and Michael Mann's *Heat* that marked her out as a serious talent who could hold her own against heavyweights like Gary Oldman and Al Pacino.

The Star Wars prequel trilogy would give her a platform of unprecedented scale, but even while starring as Padmé Amidala for George Lucas, she found time for the varied likes of *Closer*, *Cold Mountain* and *Garden State* (not to mention studying for a degree in psychology at Harvard). And that eclecticism has continued since, with a filmography littered with collaborations with directors like Wes Anderson, Wong Kar-wai, Pablo Larraín and Darren Aronofsky (the latter resulting in a Best Actress Oscar for *Black Swan*), nestled alongside broader comedies and Marvel movies.

Next up, she's making her first major foray into television, with Apple TV+ miniseries *Lady in the Lake*, which she stars in and produces with the production company she co-founded, MountainA. 'It was really tricky,' she says of juggling the acting and producing responsibilities, 'because it was a really complicated production. We had many challenges along the way, and so it was very much like "put on one hat, put on another hat".'

The show – adapted from the acclaimed novel by Laura Lippman – is largely set in 1960s Baltimore and follows the story of two women. Maddie (Portman) is a stifled Jewish housewife craving to return to work in investigative journalism, who finds herself following the story of two murders. One of those killed was Cleo Johnson (Moses Ingram, *The Queen's Gambit*, *Obi-Wan Kenobi*), a Black woman with political connections. Through the unfolding mystery (and Cleo's narration), these two women become inextricably entangled. Like much of Portman's work, it's intelligent, rich, and deals with numerous potent themes, including power dynamics through the prism of race, religion and gender.

Alma Har'el (*Honey Boy*) serves as the showrunner and director and leads the writing, too. '[Har'el] was just extraordinary in weathering all of the challenges, and just facing them, and making the best of everything, and just staying creative, and staying true to her vision,' beams Portman of her key collaborator.

It's rare to be able to have a career that begins in childhood ('Because most child labour is illegal!' laughs Portman), but it's been remarkable up to this point, and by the sounds of it, she has no plans to coast anytime soon…

Portman as Queen Amidala in *Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace*

***Lady in the Lake* is a fascinating show, with so many dimensions to it. Was there one particular thing that stood out to you as the main draw?**

Well, I was really excited to work with Alma Har'el. I was a big admirer of hers, and I connected with her immediately when we first met. And I was excited to explore a woman living in Baltimore at that time. My grandmother is from Baltimore, so I kind of imagined… my ancestors', my great-grandparents', and my grandmother's city was very exciting for me. And, of course, many of the themes that the show deals with are also interesting to me.

In 2020, you wore that amazing cape to the Oscars with the female directors' names stitched in it, and Alma's name was on there. How far does your connection go back with her?

Yes! That was so funny – that happened when we hadn't met yet. So when we met for the first time, she mentioned how she had seen that. It was like we had this kind of connection before we literally connected.

And how did you find it actually getting to know her, and work with her?

It was extraordinary. It was so inspiring, every day. She's so creative and so focused, and has such a vision, and is such a great leader. It's crazy to sustain that focus and creativity and positivity for so long. She was writing and directing every episode – writing with a team, but still leading that. It was just extraordinary to watch her, and to get to work with her.

This is the first big TV project for you, and Alma's first time showrunning. Did you feel like you were both adjusting to a new medium together?

It was nice, because we were also able to do it our own way, and find our own feet, as opposed to knowing how it's done. I think it was also nice coming from film that it felt like making just a very long film. And the biggest difference, I think, was the sustenance required to maintain that energy for so long.

Did you find that longer format challenging, or was it liberating to get that extended time with the character?

Well, it's very exciting to get to that level with the character and to have that space to explore a character. And, also, I loved working with Alma and her methods. She would allow things to get very improvisational. It really felt like we were doing Cassavetes sometimes. It was so exciting and fun and creative. But I think the

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Portman plays housewife-turned-investigative-journalist Maddie in the upcoming *Lady in the Lake*

biggest challenge was, again, to be working that much for that long. It was exhausting in a way that I've never felt before.

Did you feel that this book needed those seven hours of TV in order to do it justice?
Yes… Jean-Marc Vallée and his producing partner, Nathan Ross, brought [Alma and me] together. They kind of made the match around this book, and said, 'You two should do this together.'

When we read it, we said, 'We only want to do it if we could give Cleo as much space as she deserves, and we want her to be a fully fleshed-out character – as much as Maddie is.' Because in the book, it's much more from Maddie's point of view.

And so I think a series allows for you to really explore these two women's lives, and how they echo each other, and how they mirror each other, and how they intersect.

> *'I WAS REALLY EXCITED TO WORK WITH ALMA HAR'EL'*

Cleo and Maddie's stories are entwined, but the nature of the story means you don't share much screen time with Moses Ingram…
Yeah. Actually, I was wishing that our characters interacted more because I think that Moses is one of the most extraordinary actresses of our time. She's just stunning. It's been lucky to get to watch her now in all the cuts. We did get to do some scenes together, which was still fun.

But, yes, mainly I shot all the stuff without her, and then we overlapped for several weeks, and then she shot her stuff without me after. We had a few weeks together, which was glorious. And then I got to watch her stunning work after.

Did you talk about your Star Wars experiences at all, because it's interesting that both of your characters were closely connected to Ewan McGregor's Obi-Wan…
I know! No, we didn't talk about it, actually. That's funny. We talked about lots of other stuff. And we talked about Baltimore a lot because she grew up there. So that came up more often. But we didn't talk Star Wars.

On the Baltimore side of things, were there family documents from your grandmother that you could lean on for additional research?
Yes. It was funny because for my mom's birthday that year, I did a huge family tree thing, and found all this stuff about where my great-grandparents lived, and their immigration documents from Austria and Russia and Baltimore, and found their grave sites there.

It was really wild to imagine. And there were some Jewish delis and stuff that still exist from that time that are like 100 years old. It was wild to be walking the streets, kind of imagining them in those footsteps.

And then my grandmother, she moved to Cincinnati by the time she was Maddie's age, but was involved in very much the same kind of world there, which was a very similar community at the time. And she was leading Jewish fundraisers and things like Maddie does.

So I had pictures of her in the 60s at that age in the newspaper – you know, president of the Jewish fundraising club in Cincinnati. There were a lot of photos that I'd be sending to Alma, being like, 'Oh my God! This is my grandma in the same year, in the same dress.'

You're an avid reader and have your book club [@natsbookclub]. So when you're reading, are you often thinking about characters you could potentially play, or stories you could adapt?
I try not to go into books with that intention because I want to enjoy the experience of a book without thinking of it like a means to an end, you know? [laughs] And I love to get lost in a great book. And also I feel that most books – most *great* books – operate best as books. There's something magical about the writing that transports you in a way that other media can't.

But, every once in a while, I will read something, and you feel that you can see it as you're reading it, or you feel that this is a character that you relate to in a different way. And, yes, in those instances, it's exciting to also adapt them.

You were someone who – from the outside, at least – seemed to make a very smooth transition from working as a child to your adult career. Is that how it felt on the inside?
I think I was very, very lucky. I think

ALAMY, APPLE TV+

part of it was that I was never really in kid films. I was a child actor in grown-up movies. So it's like I kind of stayed making the same kind of movies consistently. I didn't have to be like, 'Oh, now I'm a cute kid in a TV show, and I have to change my image,' or something.

But, yeah, I felt very lucky to work… you know, obviously in 30 years, there's been moments where I'm like, 'I'm not getting the parts that I'm interested in!' But, you know, I've also learned that there are waves. It comes and goes, and comes back again.

Did you ever feel daunted in any of those early roles? As you say, they're grown-up films, and you worked with some big acting and directing names.
I wasn't aware enough. And, also, I was lucky in that everyone was very kind and, like, not scary. They made an effort to not intimidate me, you know? They immediately tried to put me at ease. There was no one I ever worked with who walked into a room and was like, 'I'm more important than you.'

Do you feel that your approach to acting has changed a great deal over the years, or are there things you've retained from the outset?
Yes, I do think that it changed a lot. I think the thing that stayed, which is so lucky, was the sense of play. I started, and it was fun for me, and I was playing, and I still feel like that now, which is so lucky. And I think that that sense that you go to work to have a good time, and enjoy the people that you're with – it's a lucky thing to have. I really didn't know anything. Obviously, I was 11 when I started, and, yeah, along the way, I picked things up, because it's scary every time when you're like, 'I don't have tools for this,' and you're just going by instinct. And then along the way, you see what other people are doing. You see how they prepare. You meet teachers who give you tools. And eventually you get a toolbox for yourself. There's always new tools. Alma introduced me to new things that I had never done before.

Have your criteria for choosing roles changed a lot over the years?
Well, I think that the people are obviously very important. The director that you're working with is the most important, and the other actors, of course. But I think that the main thing that's changed is that I specifically look for things that are not like my life now.

I don't know that I ever did things that were like my life, but I wasn't as conscious about it. And now I'm like, I love my life.

FIVE STAR TURNS

LEON 1994
Talk about a killer debut. Precocious Portman beat out 2,000 wannabes to the role of Mathilda, a 12-year-old orphan who becomes the protégé of Jean Reno's eponymous assassin. Trade bible *Variety* noted Portman's 'appealing spontaneity'.

CLOSER 2004
Portman scored her first Oscar nomination in Mike Nichols' adap of Patrick Marber's acclaimed play. Nichols protected her in the filming of the strip dance. 'He wants to see my bare ass [even] less than my father would,' she said.

BLACK SWAN 2010
Portman won the Oscar playing a ballerina who's pushed to breaking point, physically and mentally, when she plays the lead in *Swan Lake*. 'The quest for perfection', as Portman put it, is something she understood well.

JACKIE 2016
Another role, another Oscar nomination, this time playing Jacqueline Kennedy in the wake of her husband's assassination. 'Her Jackie is scattered, tense, wrecked and defiant,' said *Time Out*. 'Portman is altogether astonishing,' gushed *The Guardian*.

MAY DECEMBER 2023
Julianne Moore and Charles Melton play the titular age-gap lovers in Todd Haynes' melodrama, but Portman's actor who preps for a role by shadowing the couple is essential to the film's high-wire tonal balancing act. **JG**

ALAMY

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I love my kids and my friends. I don't want to go and pretend and be with other kids and friends [laughs]. I want to do something that's an experience that I wouldn't get to have normally, like exploring what my grandmother's existence was like, or, you know, playing a rock star or an astronaut or something that feels like, 'Oh, I'm getting to dip my toes into another existence.'

You studied at Harvard when your acting career was well under way. How important was it for you to take the time for that at that point in your life?
It was never really a question for me, and it was so important for me in… I mean, the main thing was that the friends I made there are my friends forever now. I don't know what my life would have been like without them so centrally in it. And it becomes kind of like your cocoon for life, to have friends like that.

And I think it also gave me a healthy relationship to my career that like… You don't have to cram it all in when you can. It's OK to take time to do things that you need for your life, then to go and work – it will be there. To be calm with [the idea] that it's important to prioritise [life] over work.

'I FEEL VERY BLESSED TO HAVE BEEN PART OF STAR WARS'

How do you look back on your whole Star Wars experience all these years later? Has your relationship with it changed much over the years?
I see it as an extraordinarily lucky thing to have been part of. I know how meaningful it is for people. And, every day, still, people are like, 'I just watched it with my kids.' To be part of something like that that's part of that cultural mythology, and part of people's childhoods, in such a vibrant way, is so, so lucky.

And, yeah, I think obviously with the reaction to them when they came out, being as harsh at it was – it was hard. And obviously, over time they've gained more appreciation, which has been nice, to always feel the balm of time. But, yeah, I feel very blessed to have been part of that, at that moment in my life.

Did the scale of it feel overwhelming when you first got involved, or did it go over your head somewhat?
I think I was both aware and also guarded from it by the fact that the internet was just kind of starting. It wasn't like it is now. There was no social media. There was a sense of it, but I still was leading a normal life. I was graduating high school. I was having my normal existence with my friends, and applying to colleges. It wasn't the only thing in my life. I was able, luckily, to have all of that still – it didn't overwhelm my life. It was just exciting.

Are there particular roles for you that you look back on as turning points?
Oh, yeah. I did *The Seagull* in Central Park with Mike Nichols directing, right after the first Star Wars came out. And that was extraordinary. That was the most incredible cast. It was Meryl Streep and Philip Seymour Hoffman and Christopher Walken and John Goodman. It was one person after the other that I admired. To get to see them all work up close, and to be in the rehearsal process, and then do one of the best plays ever written together for free in Central Park – it was the dream of a lifetime.

And to get to work with Mike, who became such an important figure in my life, and then to do *Closer* with him a few years later… I think that was really what kind of got me, I guess, sort of my first steps into what we were talking about before, about building that toolbox, and how to do it.

And then, of course, *Black Swan* was really, really an incredible experience. I loved making it so much, and working with Darren was so incredible. And then *Jackie*, I think, also was a really amazing one to work on. I loved the experience of making it. It was so special, and, again, it was a new challenge to play a well-known, real person, which was never something I thought I could do. It was honestly something I did because it logistically worked with my family life [laughs], and it turned into this unbelievable creative experience.

And then probably *May December* for being the first thing that we made with our production company [MountainA], and working with Todd [Haynes] and Julianne [Moore] and Charles [Melton], and to feel that we had a hand in helping that vision come to life, which was such an amazing thing.

You recently said that you've never reached the feeling of having 'made it'. Did winning an Oscar for *Black Swan* not give that feeling in a way?
It's such an intense experience because it's become such a marathon where there's just one thing after the other after the other, and you're in hair and make-up every single day, and in dresses and heels. I was pregnant. I kind of was like, 'What's happening?'

NATALIE PORTMAN IN NUMBERS

$1.05BN
Box-office take of Portman's highest-grossing film, *Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace* (excluding *Avengers: Endgame*'s cameo)

71
Acting credits to date

3
Academy Award nominations – and one win

23
Years old when she received her first Oscar nom

2
Episodes of *The Simpsons* Portman has appeared in

I feel like I was just completely disoriented, you know? I didn't know up from down. So it's hard to even say… [laughs] Now I look back on it, I'm like, 'Oh my God, that was so amazing.' But when I was in it, I was in a fog. It just felt like: 'Where do I have to go next?'

It's a shame. I wish they would slow it down a little bit somehow, and take it down a notch. I was like, 'You know, if I could just roll out of bed, and put on my T-shirt and jeans, and do this stuff – I would probably be able to take in the environment a little bit more.'

You mentioned *Jackie*, and the idea of playing real people is explored in *May December*. Did that change the way you think about playing real-life figures?
Yeah. I think there is a certain vampiric quality where you are using someone's life as your material, and you have to be thoughtful and sensitive about it while also attacking the material. You want to go at it with your entire self, but you also want to consider the effect it might have

'PEOPLE WILL DISCOVER THE THINGS THAT ARE BEAUTIFUL'

if, of course, the person is alive. That's a whole different thing as well.

You talked about not wanting to play characters who are like you – does it help when you have accents and costumes you can lean into?
I think it's always helpful to have these markers of what's different from you. It immediately makes it someone who's not you when you have an accent, or when you're dressed differently. Those things are helpful. It's the hardest, actually, when you don't have that to hide behind.

You've directed one feature, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*. What did you take away from that, and can you see yourself directing again?
I loved it so much. I thought it was really one of the most moving experiences of my life to have a group of people helping me make what I saw in my head become real. I would love to do it again, and, yeah, I hope to.

Were there any lessons you've learned from any of the greats you've worked with that you tried to apply?

ALAMY, PAMELA HANSON/TRUNK ARCHIVE

Finally getting to pick up the hammer in *Thor: Love and Thunder*

Oh, I learn something all the time from everyone I work with. I've learned so many things from directors I've worked with, and the ways they talk to actors, and the way they frame, and the types of camera they use. It's very lucky, I think, as an actor, that you get to observe so many sets. I always think about first-time directors who have never been on a set before, and I think, 'Wow, they must be very brave to do that, when they're there on their first day.'

In terms of the projects you've produced recently, like *Lady in the Lake*, *Vox Lux* and *May December*, these are all morally complex stories. Do they require you to get involved on that level to get them made?
Yeah, they're hard to get made, and are getting harder. But they're also the most interesting ones to make, and it's exciting when they find their audiences. They're very rewarding.

Looking back, are you glad you got the chance to return to Jane Foster and become the Mighty Thor?
Yeah, it was so fun. I had such a great time making it. I loved working with Taika [Waititi], and Chris [Hemsworth] is just the greatest, and so is Tessa [Thompson]. I was just laughing all day, every day. There's only my highest love for that experience – and not to mention Australia, which is just the most glorious country.

Is the comedy a very different challenge to the dramatic side of acting?
I love it. It is very different. But I love the kind of improvisational spirit that you can take back and forth between the two. Like what we were doing on *Thor: Love and Thunder* was actually quite similar to what we were doing on *Lady in the Lake*. You just take something and riff on it. And when you have a willing partner and a great leader, you can really just go for it.

Could you ever see yourself returning to Jane, or did you consider *Love and Thunder* to be your farewell to that character?
Oh, I have no idea. I mean, no one's asked me to. So I don't know. But sure, that was super-fun.

Star Wars and the Marvel Cinematic Universe are two things that have massively obsessive fans, but what for you would be the things that you yourself would geek out about?
I'm a real book nerd. When I get to meet writers, and talk to writers that I love, I geek out.

Are there any of your own films that you wish had been seen more widely?
Anywhere but Here is an early one I made that I've always wished was more… Like, I felt it was a great film, and it didn't get the legs that I had hoped. *Vox Lux* didn't get in cinemas as much as I had hoped, but then afterwards I feel like so many people have found it later – that's generally been my experience with things that are good that don't necessarily open big or whatever. They usually find their people later.

Do you take it to heart if a film doesn't open to expectations?
No. I mean, that's the beauty of the accessibility of films now, online. I do feel like people will discover the things that are beautiful in their time. Obviously, I just hope, always, for the opportunity to keep making films. That's the only thing – I'm like, 'Oh, I hope they let me make another one.'

Looking ahead, what can we expect from the upcoming Guy Ritchie movie *Fountain of Youth*?
It's like an action-comedy-adventure extravaganza, and it's been super, super fun to shoot.

This is very morbid, but *Lady in the Lake* explores the idea of attending your own funeral. If you were in charge of your own In Memoriam clips, is there anything you would particularly like to see in there?
Oh, shit, that is very morbid [laughs]. I don't know. I don't really expect to be remembered except for the people who love me, so… [laughs] My friends and family can remember me laughing over a glass of wine at night.

LADY IN THE LAKE PREMIERES WITH TWO EPISODES ON APPLE TV+ FROM 19 JULY AND WILL AIR NEW EPISODES WEEKLY.

NATALIE PORTMAN LINE READING

'IS LIFE ALWAYS THIS HARD, OR IS IT JUST WHEN YOU'RE A KID?'
MATHILDA
LEON

'If you can't laugh at yourself, life is going to seem a whole lot longer than you'd like.'
SAM
GARDEN STATE

'EAT MY HAMMER!'
JANE FOSTER
THOR: LOVE AND THUNDER

EDITED BY
MATTHEW LEYLAND
@TOTALFILM_MATTL

★★★★★
GETS YOUR MOTOR RUNNING

★★★★½
RACES WITH THE WIND

★★★½★
(ALMOST) CLIMBS SO HIGH

★★★★★
DOESN'T MAKE IT HAPPEN

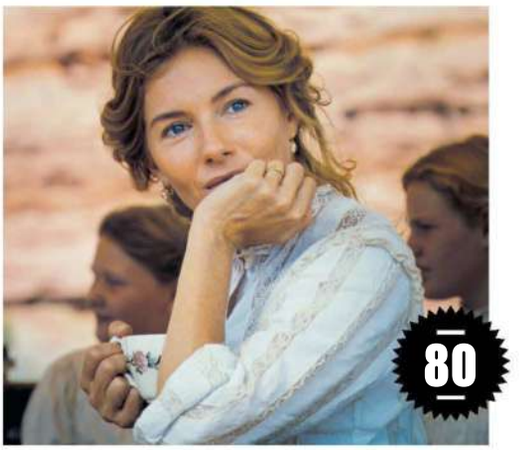
★★★★★
BORN TO BE REVILED

SCREE

THE WORLD'S MOST TRUSTED MOVIE

78

THE BIKERIDERS
Austin horsepower...



80

82

84

88

OUT NOW

Arcadian	★★	p86
Atlas	★★	p88
Bad Boys: Ride or Die	★★★	p81
The Boy in the Woods	★★★	p88
Deep Sea	★★★	p87
Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga	★★★★	p84
Heart of an Oak	★★★	p85
The Moor	★★★★	p85
My National Gallery, London	★★★	p88
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Twilight of the Warriors: Walled In	★★★	p88
What Remains	★★★	p82
Young Woman and the Sea	★★★★	p88

21 JUNE

The Bikeriders	★★★★	p78
Bread & Roses	★★★★	p81
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26 JUNE

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28 JUNE

Bye Bye Tiberias	★★★★	p83
Eternal You	★★★★	p81
Fancy Dance	★★★★	p82
A Greyhound of a Girl	★★★★	p85
Horizon: An American Saga – Chapter 1	★★★★	p80
Kinds of Kindness	★★	p83
Rose	★★★	p83

5 JULY

The Imaginary	★★★★	p87
The Nature of Love	★★★★	p85
Orlando, My Political Biography	★★★★	p87
Unicorns	★★★	p81

8 JULY

Loop Track	★★★★	p83
Problemista	★★★	p86

12 JULY

Damaged	★★	p83
It's Raining Men	★★★	p81
Sleep	★★★★	p80

ALSO RELEASED

We couldn't see them in time for this issue, so head to gamesradar.com/totalfilm for reviews of the following:

TITLE	RELEASE DATE
Beverly Hills Cop: Axel F	3 July
Despicable Me 4	12 July
The Exorcism	21 June
Fly Me to the Moon	12 July
In a Violent Nature	12 July
Inside Out 2	Out now
Kill	5 July
MaXXXine	5 July
A Quiet Place: Day One	28 June

For more reviews visit gamesradar.com/totalfilm

EXTRAS

Archive/Blu-ray reviews	p89-91
TV, Extras, Soundtracks, Games, Books	p92-96

REVIEWS

THE BIKERIDERS 15

Wheel-life drama...

★★★★★ **OUT 21 JUNE** CINEMAS

SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED

EASY RIDER
1969
Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper go looking for America in this seminal counterculture hit.

MAD MAX: FURY ROAD
2015
Tom Hardy feels the need for speed in George Miller's epic revival of his iconic franchise.

LOVING
2016
An interracial marriage comes under attack in Jeff Nichols' previous 60s-set saga.

For more reviews visit gamesradar.com/totalfilm

As far back as I can remember, I always wanted to be a biker...' All right, so nobody actually says that line in Jeff Nichols' absorbing study of a Chicago motorcycle crew living their lives on two wheels at the tailpipe of the 1960s. Yet someone may as well do, given how much his latest opus unabashedly echoes *GoodFellas* in its technique, plotting and structure.

From an opening face-off outside a dusty out-of-town drinking hole that ends with a violent freeze frame, the *Take Shelter* and *Midnight Special* director plumps for a voiceover-driven, subculture-scrutinising approach that thrums with Scorsese-isms (check out those nostalgia-laden needle drops!) and knowing Henry Hill-esque callbacks. Yet while the style seems familiar, the material feels fresh: a testament not only to how Nichols lovingly moulds a fictional story around the photos Danny Lyon took for his seminal 1968 book *The Bikeriders*, but also to the flesh his actors put on the bones of the rebellious archetypes who populate it.

Tom Hardy for one has rarely been broodier as leader of the pack Johnny, a king of the road who rules the roost over his boozing, brawling acolytes with a stern but benevolent hand. *Elvis* star Austin Butler, meanwhile, is quiet soulfulness personified as Benny, the softly-spoken loner Johnny has earmarked as his likeliest successor. Benny is a guy who talks with his fists, jousts with the police and exudes the gallant nobility of a crumpled latter-day knight. Small wonder he seemingly only has to bat his eyes at the initially censorious Kathy (Jodie Comer) to make her his pillion plus-one for life.

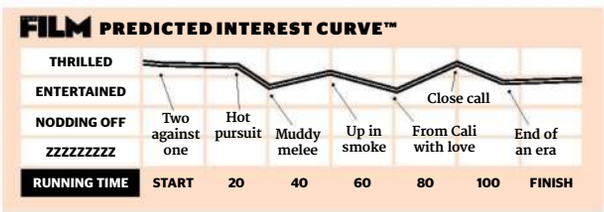
Comer does most of the narrating in this chronicle of the Vandals' rise and fall, in a broad Midwestern accent some may find grating. Thankfully, that's the only false note in a yarn that otherwise exudes authenticity, from the metal stallions its characters take out onto the highway to the dirt-smeared denims they favour. Kudos to costume designer Erin Benach for giving every member something distinctive to differentiate them from the throng. DoP Adam Stone, meanwhile, deserves no less praise for the way he captures the landscape's vacant and poetic grandeur.

Amid a rich ensemble, Nichols regular Michael Shannon is a stand-out as Zipco, a scary-eyed wild one with

Born to be wild: Benny (Austin Butler) and his fellow Vandals hit the road

UNIVERSAL

DIRECTOR Jeff Nichols **STARRING** Jodie Comer, Austin Butler, Tom Hardy, Michael Shannon, Mike Faist, Norman Reedus **SCREENPLAY** Jeff Nichols **DISTRIBUTOR** Universal **RUNNING TIME** 116 mins



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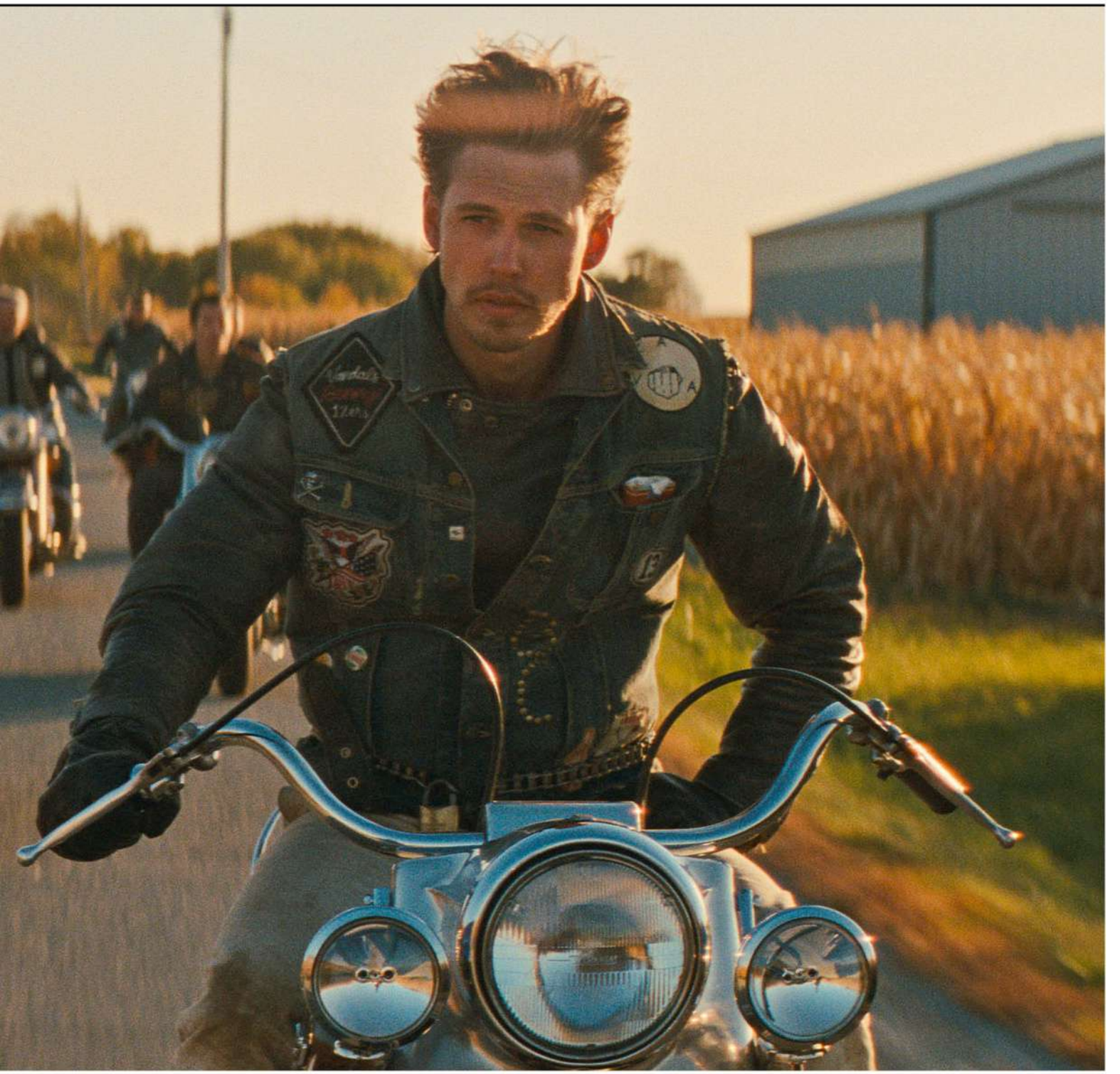
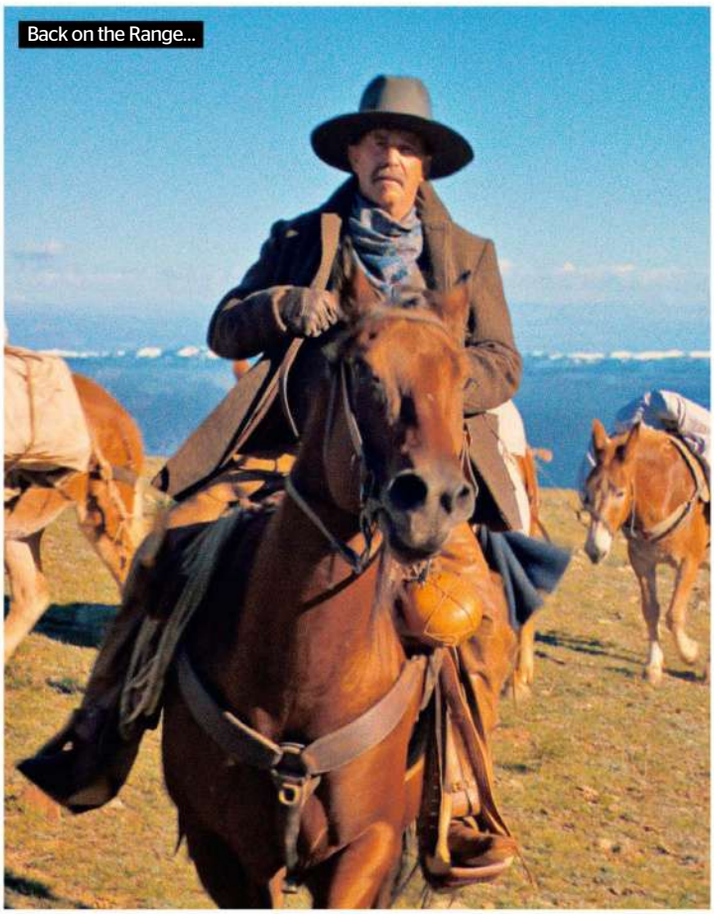


a virulent hatred of 'pinkos'. Yet even he gets upstaged when Norman Reedus arrives as Sonny, a filth-encrusted hellion whose appearance signals the point the gang's noble code starts to get contaminated by trouble-making newcomers like Toby Wallace's interloper, an ambitious upstart billed merely as 'The Kid'.

Lyon himself (played by Mike Faist) is a peripheral figure, only there to take snaps and record Kathy and others on his clunky reel-to-reel. Yet his images – the reason, after all, for this film's existence – are rightly given their due. Take the memorable scene where bikers form a solemn guard of honour at one of their number's funeral, a visual that serves as a moving encapsulation of their camaraderie and solidarity. Or another moment, lifted wholesale from Lyon's tome, that sees a helmet-less Benny glancing nonchalantly over his shoulder while tearing across a bridge, with another span extending behind him to who knows where. **NEIL SMITH**

'Austin Butler's Benny is a guy who talks with his fists, jousts with police and exudes the gallant nobility of a crumpled latter-day knight'

THE VERDICT You can almost smell the asphalt in this elegiac drama about outsiders forging a fraternity from leather, fuel and chrome.


Back on the Range...

HORIZON: AN AMERICAN SAGA – CHAPTER 1 TBC

Hold your horses...

★★★★★ **OUT 28 JUNE** CINEMAS

Kevin Costner made his directorial debut with *Dances with Wolves* (1990), but he hasn't helmed a film since 2003's *Open Range*. Now he's back with the gargantuan *Horizon*, a classical horse opera in the John Ford mould that will reportedly span four films, with *Chapter 2* slated for release in August.

A kaleidoscopic ensemble piece, *Chapter 1* is set during the American Civil War. Exploring the expansion of the American West, it follows white settlers across Wyoming and Montana as they travel to a town called Horizon. The environment proves hostile; early on, Costner lets rip with an astonishing scene involving an ambush by Native Americans.

Among those facing the carnage is Frances (Sienna Miller), a mother of two who hides beneath ground with her daughter as her house is torched. We also encounter tough-as-nails women played by Jena Malone and Abbey Lee, the latter a single mother who eventually finds her way to Costner's cowpoke Hayes Ellison.

Running at three hours, *Chapter 1* takes unhurried relish in establishing characters who, in some cases, have more story to tell, including Sam Worthington's First Lt. Trent Gephardt. Meanwhile, the attention paid to the Indigenous characters is hopefully a sign of more to come. Concluding with a *Chapter 2* preview, *Horizon* feels like episodic TV for the cinema, conceived on a grand scale. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

THE VERDICT A rigorous, handsome drama, Costner's directing comeback is an absorbing ride into the Old West.

SLEEP 15

Home discomforts...

★★★★★ **OUT 12 JULY** CINEMAS

The marital bed turns into an arena for one woman's waking nightmare in writer-director Jason Yu's feature debut. When Hyun-su (Lee Sun-kyun) begins sleepwalking and uttering threats in the night, his wife Soo-jin (Jung Yu-mi) fears that he may hurt her and their newborn baby. 'Are you going to kill my daughter?' the terrified mother asks as he snoozes on the sofa. 'I don't know,' comes the chilling response.

Yu treats Hyun-su's sleep disorder with the gravity of a demonic possession, with Soo-jin enlisting doctors and spiritualists to get to the bottom of his ailment. The story is sparse but purposeful, Yu cranking up the tension as Soo-jin's wariness grows. But as Hyun-su's somnambulism takes its toll on Soo-jin's mental state, is she the best judge of character?

Splitting this unsettling marriage story across three acts, Yu transforms a cosy apartment into a space from Freddy's nightmares, all occultist Post-it notes and flickering candlelight. Shifting perspectives twist the narrative as the story enters its nerve-shredding finale, while the performances captivate as the walls close in.

The climactic excesses sit at odds with an otherwise restrained genre work, but a sense of smothering intimacy keeps things grounded in reality – or a nightmarish semblance of such. Confident and subversive, the result is a carefully balanced twist on supernatural horror conventions. **JOEL HARLEY**

THE VERDICT Writer-director Jason Yu delivers an eye-opening work of Korean horror, compellingly acted.

Step into a waking nightmare with this K-horror debut

WARNER BROS, CURZON, DOGWOOF, SIGNATURE, APPLE, PARKLAND, SONY

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ETERNAL YOU TBC

★★★★★ **OUT 28 JUNE** CINEMAS

AI looks grimmer than ever in this disquieting doc, charting the growth of 'death capitalism'. Filmmakers Hans Block and Moritz Riesewieck (*The Cleaners*) mount a respectably objective take on the developing market for simulations of lost loved ones; entrepreneurs don't go unheard. Yet even if the interviews here might have challenged their subjects harder, a clear sense emerges from the murk of an uncertain future that users are guinea pigs in AI experiments designed to commodify – and exploit – remembrance and loss. As one commentator notes, 'It diminishes us.' **KEVIN HARLEY**

UNICORNS 15

★★★★★ **OUT 5 JULY** CINEMAS

Following swiftly on the heels of psychological thriller *Femme*, this is another contemporary British drama focusing on a queer, cross-cultural love story. Twenty-something Luke (Ben Hardy) is an Essex garage mechanic and single father who develops feelings for British Indian drag queen Aysha (Jason Patel), a nightclub performer in the underground 'gaysian' scene and the son of observant Muslim parents. Co-directed by Sally El Hosaini (*The Swimmers*) and James Krishna Floyd, *Unicorns* is simultaneously gritty and romantic, and notable for its affecting lead performances. **TOM DAWSON**

BREAD & ROSES TBC

★★★★★ **OUT 21 JUNE** APPLE TV+

This Jennifer Lawrence-produced documentary draws attention to the period of upheaval that followed the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in 2021, when millions of women were suddenly stripped of their basic rights. As helmed by Afghan filmmaker Sahra Mani (whose 2018 film *A Thousand Girls Like Me* explored a story of sexual abuse in a similar manner), the film follows the experiences of three women on ground zero, whose lives were left in ruins by the regime. A testament to female resilience, the result brims with empathy and righteous fury. **JOEL HARLEY**

IT'S RAINING MEN TBC

★★★★★ **OUT 12 JULY** CINEMAS

Frustrated in a sexless marriage to her workaholic husband, dental practitioner Iris (Laure Calamy, *Call My Agent!*) takes a friend's advice to seek extramarital company so that she can feel desirable again. As Iris' phone buzzes more than her dentist's drill with dating-app messages, she decides to venture out and enjoy all that this newfound world has to offer. Soufflé-light – and equally insubstantial – director Caroline Vignal's comedy keeps the dramatic barometer low, leaving it to the effortlessly charismatic Calamy to get the humidity rising. **CHRIS SCHILLING**

Another tie in the all-star rock/paper/scissors championships

BAD BOYS: RIDE OR DIE 15

A matter of laughs and death...

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

Nearly 30 years after the original *Bad Boys*, Will Smith and Martin Lawrence bounce back with a fourquel that sees their Miami-cop characters Mike Lowrey and Marcus Burnett fighting to clear the name of their boss Captain Howard (Joe Pantoliano), who's posthumously accused of corruption. The intervention of a mysterious new foe (Eric Dane) means they end up on the run themselves, along with Lowrey's son Armando (Jacob Scipio).

The plot isn't desperately involving: it's a vehicle to take our heroes – who range from hapless to highly skilled – from one action-comedy scene to another. After Marcus has a brush with death, much of the laughs comes from his newfound mystical beliefs, including the conviction that he's invincible. Less amusing is his ongoing obsession with junk food, the source of some overplayed set-pieces and very obvious product placement.

Numerous familiar female characters (including Vanessa Hudgens' weapons expert and Paola Núñez's police captain) come back to either wield guns or play damsels in distress, but the focus is firmly on the genial central pair as they dart around Miami raising the body count. Collateral damage is often played for giggles – life is pretty cheap in this world, unless you're one of the good/bad boys. Yet as with their previous adventures, the two headline stars still have enough charisma together to see this through. **ANNA SMITH**

THE VERDICT While it's stronger on gunplay and horseplay than plot, this is a solid entry for *BB* fans.

'You know how to make a fire, hon?' 'No, me neither'

FANCY DANCE 15

Travels with my aunt...

★★★★★ **OUT 28 JUNE** CINEMAS, APPLE TV+

A companion piece of sorts to *Killers of the Flower Moon*, Erica Tremblay's narrative feature debut finds its star Lily Gladstone in a contemporary yet familiar role: that of an Indigenous woman railing against prejudice, poverty and injustice.

Set on the Seneca-Cayuga reservation in north-east Oklahoma, its story of an aunt's attempts to locate her feared-dead sister while raising her teenage niece flirts with road-movie and crime tropes before revealing its true subject: the female ties that bind communities in the face of masculine violence.

Jax (Gladstone) can't get the authorities to give a fig about her missing sibling Tawi (Hauli Gray). But when it comes to Tawi's unruly daughter Roki (Isabel Deroy-Olson), they can't wait to hand over custody to her white grandfather Frank (Shea Whigham). Determined to attend a tribal gathering in Oklahoma City, Roki persuades Jax to smuggle her away from her guardians. Jax's 'borrowing' of Frank's car puts the cops on their tail in what becomes a quest to discover what happened to Tawi and a defiant affirmation of their Native heritage.

Like Thelma and Louise before them, Jax and Roki make an appealing duo. As engaging as Deroy-Olson is, though, Gladstone provides the emotional fulcrum for a film that's as modest and self-contained as Scorsese's multiple-Oscar-nominated epic was sprawling and operatic. **NEIL SMITH**

THE VERDICT Gladstone's gutsy turn anchors a drama that doesn't need to be fancy to be forceful.

NIGHTSIREN 18

FILM ★★★★★ **OUT NOW** ARROW, BD

EXTRAS ★★★★★

Commentary, Video essays, Booklet, Poster

Witchy folk-horror drama gives way to more real-world terrors in Tereza Nvotová's ferocious study of parochialism and patriarchal oppression, filtered through the lens of Slovakian folklore. Natália Germáni stars as Šarlota, a young woman returning to the village she fled decades earlier, haunted by memories of a tragic accident. Treated with suspicion by the locals, she befriends fellow outsider Mira (Eva Mores); but when two children go missing the pair get caught up in a gripping modern-day witch hunt. **ANTON VAN BEEK**

TELL THAT TO THE WINTER SEA 15

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

1 JULY DIGITAL

Saltburn vibes abound in this tale of a teacher reunited with her old girlfriend in a leafy country pile. Actor Jo (Greta Bellamacina) is about to get hitched, to a beau we never see. Yet having Scarlet (Amber Anderson) around inevitably evokes memories of their youthful fling, recreated in flashbacks that awkwardly require the 30-something leads to play their characters at school age. The hen do that follows sees Tamsin Egerton and others swell Jaclyn Bethany's all-female ensemble. Sadly, her film irks more than illuminates. **NEIL SMITH**

THE G 15

★★★★★ **OUT 21 JUNE** CINEMAS

Dale Dickey's glorious, granite-tough performance as Ann Hunter, a revenge-seeking grandma, gives real heft to this gritty Coen-esque noir about a ruthless elder-care guardianship scam. Director Karl R. Hearne (*Touched*) wrings love and pathos from Ann's prickly partnership with Romane Denis' slacker granddaughter, Emma, desperate to get her 'G' sprung from a deadly care home, and looking for help in all the wrong places. But too many crooks (and convolutions) spoil the plot, as betrayals and backstabbings twist the race to grab G's hidden nest-egg into a story pretzel. **KATE STABLES**

WHAT REMAINS 15

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** DIGITAL

5 JULY CINEMAS

Inspired by the true story of a Swedish serial killer, this Nordic noir stars Andrea Riseborough and Stellan Skarsgård as the therapist and policeman tasked with making sense of the case. No easy feat when the killer himself (Gustaf Skarsgård) isn't even sure what happened. Directed by Ran Huang from a screenplay co-written by Megan Everett-Skarsgård (Stellan's wife), this bleak thriller isn't short on intensity, emanating from its perma-scowling cast and moody cinematography. The grim atmosphere is impressively sustained throughout but is ultimately one-note. **JOEL HARLEY**

APPLE, ARROW, KALEIDOSCOPE, LIGHTBULB, ICON, ARROW, SIGNATURE, BULLDOG, TAPE, SEARCHLIGHT

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LOOP TRACK TBC

★★★★★ **OUT 8 JULY** BD

EXTRAS ★★★★★

Commentary, Featurettes, Promo video, Short film, Booklet, Poster

Wellington Paranormal's Tom Sainsbury writes, directs and stars in this well-crafted wilderness horror about a man on the verge of a nervous breakdown whose trek through the New Zealand bush is interrupted by overeager hikers and… something far more dangerous. Serving up a canny mix of creeping paranoia with subtle humour, this low-budget gem meticulously builds towards an outrageous finale reveal we guarantee you won't see coming. **ANTON VAN BEEK**

DAMAGED 15

★★★★★ **OUT 12 JULY** DIGITAL

Burnt-out Chicago detective Samuel L. Jackson comes to (checks notes) Edinburgh to help local policeman Gianni Capaldi (who also co-wrote and produced) catch a serial killer in Terry McDonough's tepid thriller. But besides that eye-catching casting coup, everything else is strictly by the book. Even strong support from Vincent Cassel, John Hannah and Kate Dickie can't dispel the sense we're watching a TV special with added gore and a script that riffs on *Se7en*. 'Why do these serial killers always bring this cult shit into it?' Jackson wonders. Why indeed?
MATT GLASBY

ROSE TBC

★★★★★ **OUT 28 JUNE** CINEMAS, DIGITAL

Set in the weeks after the death of Diana, Princess of Wales in 1997, this compassionately observed drama from Danish writer/director Niels Arden Oplev (*The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*) concerns a pair of sisters, Inger (Sofie Gråbøl) and Ellen (Lene Maria Christensen), who embark on a group tour from Copenhagen to Paris. Inger's schizophrenia, however, makes everyday tasks highly challenging. Structured as a road trip, *Rose* explores the stigmatisation of its central character and the emotional strain endured by her loved ones, aided by an unshowy turn from *The Killing*'s Gråbøl. **TOM DAWSON**

BYE BYE TIBERIAS TBC

★★★★★ **OUT 28 JUNE** CINEMAS

'Don't open the gate to past sorrows,' director Lina Soualem remembers her mother, the actor Hiam Abbass, chiding her whenever she asked about Abbass leaving the village she was raised in to pursue her chosen career. This moving and intimate documentary does just that, returning Abbass to her former home for an emotional exhumation of her Palestinian family's history of hardship and displacement. Positioning Abbass' success within a wider generational tableau, Soualem's heartfelt film tells an affecting story of sad goodbyes and brave new beginnings. **NEIL SMITH**

'So, are we recreating your *La La Land* dance scene or what?'

KINDS OF KINDNESS TBC

Outer limits...

★★★★★ **OUT 28 JUNE** CINEMAS

Hot on the heels of the Oscar-winning *Poor Things*, Yorgos Lanthimos delivers another eccentric feature with Emma Stone, Willem Dafoe and Margaret Qualley. But aside from sprinklings of sex, the similarities end there. Rather than working with writer Tony McNamara (*Poor Things*, *The Favourite*), Lanthimos here reteams with scripter Efthymis Filippou (*Dogtooth*, *The Lobster*, *The Killing of a Sacred Deer*), hinting that something darker and more surreal awaits. And boy, do we get it…

Split into three parts, *Kinds* casts Jesse Plemons in three roles: a dutiful man going to extremes to please his wealthy funder (Dafoe); a policeman suspicious that his wife (Stone) isn't really his wife at all; and a sex-cult member looking for a woman who can resurrect the dead.

The intriguing set-ups wouldn't look out of place in twist-driven series *The Twilight Zone* or the works of Franz Kafka. But the tone is so bleak, the dialogue so off-kilter, that it's hard to enjoy the film between its comical moments. And as an allegory about power, sex and control, it doesn't say anything particularly profound.

The costumes and stylings are fun, the leads terrific, though many of the cast are underused or objectified at worst – passive female nudity is a frequent feature. The result plays like a dare to see if audiences will run with it, but mainstream viewers might find it hard to sign up.
ANNA SMITH

THE VERDICT Lanthimos returns to his bleak roots with a hollow affair, lacking the appeal of his strongest work.

These rides went much faster since they made the switch to motorised bikes

SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED

STAGECOACH
1939
Mad Max movies owe a debt to westerns, and riff, repeatedly, on *Stagecoach*'s carriage-drag stunt.

LAWRENCE OF ARABIA
1962
Furiosa goes huge on desert-scapes swarming with ant-like armies.

KILL BILL
2003-04
Another traumatised woman conducting a roaring rampage of revenge.

For more reviews visit gamesradar.com/totalfilm

FURIOSA: A MAD MAX SAGA 15

Stairway to mayhem...

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

DIRECTOR George Miller **STARRING** Anya Taylor-Joy, Chris Hemsworth, Tom Burke, Lachy Hulme, Alyla Browne **SCREENPLAY** George Miller, Nico Lathouris **DISTRIBUTOR** Warner Bros. **RUNNING TIME** 148 mins

Do you have it in you to make it epic?' asks crazed antagonist Dementus (Chris Hemsworth) of heroine Furiosa (Anya Taylor-Joy) as their fury roads intersect in blazing flames. No need to ask that question of director George Miller, whose prequel to *Mad Max: Fury Road* supersizes story, mythology, scorching desert-scapes and action set-pieces in an attempt to dwarf that 2015 masterpiece.

Fury Road, the fourth instalment in Miller's franchise, had a lean-machine plot threading its vehicular mayhem. This fifth outing goes deeper and wider to give us the coming-of-rage origin story of Furiosa, who as a child (Alyla Browne) is snatched from Edenic hideaway The Green Place and delivered to warlord Dementus. The maggot-infested meat of the tale is her growth into the warrior queen we know: Charlize Theron's shaven-skulled, one-armed Imperator, who leads the 'breeder' wives in fleeing the Citadel ruled by Immortan Joe (Lachy Hulme replaces the late Hugh Keays-Byrne).

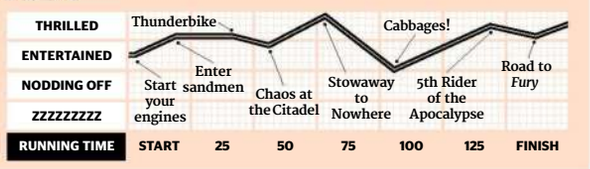
The journey includes Furiosa's hate-fuelled rampage of revenge against Dementus, which Taylor-Joy sells with fierce eyes and rageful spirit. Hemsworth keeps his vicious villainy just the right side of cartoony, despite a streak of camp: the sight of Big D riding a chariot behind a trio of motorbikes like Ben-Hur heading to a fetish club is a hoot.

Meanwhile, the set-pieces threaten to become repetitive but always find ways to surprise. In-camera thrills take glorious precedence, occasionally augmented by CGI. The apex of the action is the 15-minute 'Stowaway to Nowhere' sequence, where colourful characters wield outlandish weapons as Miller catapults their kamikaze vehicles at the speeding War Rig from all angles. It's an astonishing scene, made more impressive still by Miller's dedication to accelerating character development as he pumps the nitro: the attacks and counter-attacks establish how enterprising Furiosa is while cementing her bond with driver Praetorian Jack (Tom Burke, commanding).

Is *Furiosa* as magnificent as *Fury Road*? No, though not because it's the first Max movie without Max, whose absence barely registers. It's a touch unwieldy, while its lament for the inevitability of war and the emptiness of revenge feels hollow given the excitement it stirs from these things. But what can't be disputed is that Miller has done it again, refusing to repeat himself as he forges spectacular new paths through the Wasteland. Oh, what a day... **JAMIE GRAHAM**

THE VERDICT This action franchise set in sun-blasted sand-scapes is evergreen. A special place in Valhalla awaits George Miller.

FILM PREDICTED INTEREST CURVE™



BULLDOG, DAZZLER MEDIA, KALEIDOSCOPE, MODERN FILMS, VERTIGO, WARNER BROS.

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THE NATURE OF LOVE

TBC

★★★★★ **OUT 5 JULY** CINEMAS

Two very different milieux collide in this amusing midlife-crisis comedy from Quebecois filmmaker Monia Chokri. Forty-year-old Sophia (Magalie Lépine-Blondeau) is a married philosophy professor, whose existence is turned upside down when she embarks on a passionate relationship with brawny builder Sylvain (Pierre-Yves Cardinal), who is renovating the couple's chalet. Smartly shot with an emphasis on reflected images and partial perspectives, *The Nature of Love* is powered along by the palpable chemistry between its romantic leads. **TOM DAWSON**

HEART OF AN OAK U

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** ICON FILM CHANNEL **12 JULY** CINEMAS

A calming 'forest bath', this glossy and charming but slightly contrived wordless documentary gets very up-close and personal for a year with the animal, bird and bug inhabitants of a 200-year-old French oak. Bathed in golden light or swaddled in snow, critters including squirrels, wood mice and jays fight for acorns, sex, territory and their lives – note the *Top Gun*-worthy goshawk chase. Less cuteness (acorn weevils bonking to Dean Martin's *Sway*) and more carnivorous action (owls go hungry here) would have given it some bite. **KATE STABLES**

THE MOOR 15

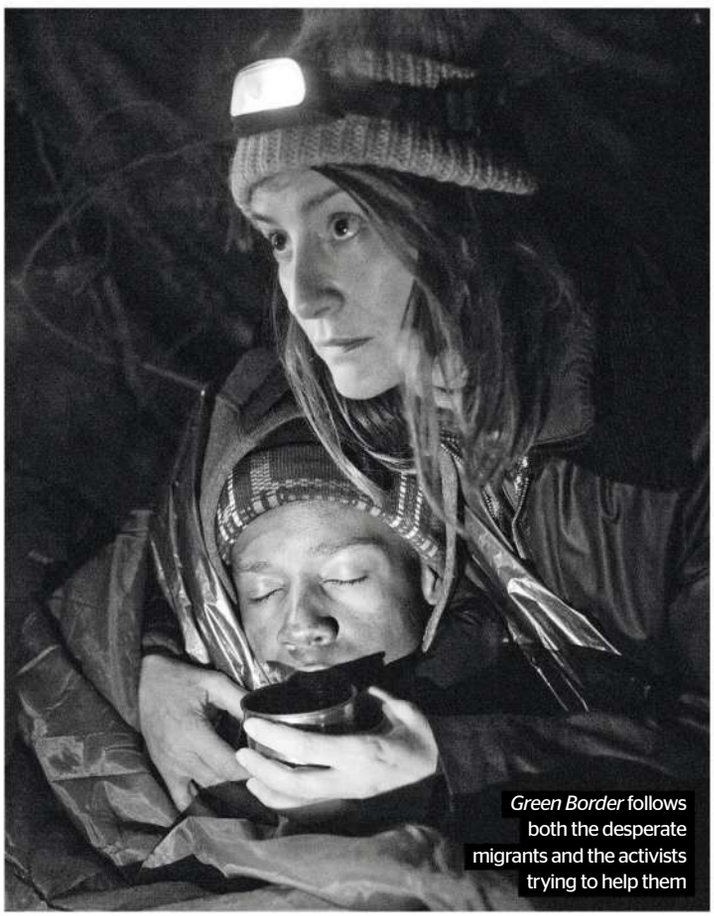
★★★★★ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS **1 JULY** DIGITAL

Twenty-five years after his young son disappeared, Bill (David Edward-Robertson) still seeks answers on the Yorkshire Moors, calling in a dowser, a psychic and one of his son's old childhood friends to look for… what? A body? A spirit? Closure? Something altogether darker? Drenched in atmosphere, director Chris Cronin's feature debut is an ambitious folk horror and unhurried character study, its carefully orchestrated scares sinking into your bones like dawn fog. Bernard Hill makes a small but telling contribution in his final film. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

A GREYHOUND OF A GIRL U

★★★★★ **OUT 28 JUNE** CINEMAS

A girl tries to come to terms with her granny's illness in this uplifting family animation. Unable to accept the news, 11-year-old Mary (Mia O'Connor) cooks a batch of colcannon and kicks off an adventure involving four generations of women. Adapted from Roddy Doyle's 2011 novel, Enzo d'Alò's film was co-produced by seven countries – including Ireland, contributing prestigious voice talent (Sharon Horgan, Brendan Gleeson) and lush landscapes. Against this backdrop, d'Alò blends coming-of-age themes with modern fantasy sweetly. **JOEL HARLEY**



Green Border follows both the desperate migrants and the activists trying to help them

GREEN BORDER 15

A state of the European Union address...

★★★★★ **OUT 21 JUNE** CINEMAS

The flux of migrant stories we've seen on our screens in the last few years speaks to the terror and division of our times. *Green Border*, directed by Polish veteran Agnieszka Holland (*Europa Europa*), is an urgent, gruelling addition.

Holland's drama follows Syrian husband and wife Bashir (Jalal Altawil) and Amina (Dalia Naous), their three children and Bashir's elderly father (Al Rashi Mohamad) as they follow the promise of safe passage into Europe via the Białowieża Forest on the border of Belarus and Poland. Only Belarusian dictator Alexander Lukashenko is using refugees as 'live bullets' to provoke the European Union, and Polish guards throw back anyone they encounter.

We watch agape as these political footballs, along with Afghan English teacher Leïla (Behi Djanati Atai) and more, are kicked back and forth, and follow one Polish guard, Janek (Tomasz Wlosok), as he begins to question his callous orders. Shooting in unblinking monochrome, Holland also finds time to follow a small band of activists who do what they can to aid the migrants but often watch helplessly on as human beings are met with degradation and death.

A critical hit at the Venice, Toronto and New York film festivals, this is an angry, searing drama that acts as a pointed indictment of the European Union in the face of widescale dehumanisation.

JAMIE GRAHAM

THE VERDICT Coming hot on the heels of *Io Capitano*, another soul-stirring migrant drama that's tough but essential.

"'Wolf-like beasts', you say? Ha! I'll have those guys for breakfast!'

ARCADIAN 15

The boys who cried wolf...

★★☆☆☆ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

We all know by now that a Nicolas Cage film has the capacity to be a rollercoaster of ups and downs. Benjamin Brewer's *Arcadian* is no exception. It throws us into a world in a state of noisy upheaval, as Cage's Paul scavenges what he can to survive and runs home to his infant sons. The opening stretch is blissfully context-free; how and why the end of the world happened isn't important – only the aftermath is.

Fifteen years on, Paul and sons Joseph (Jaeden Martell) and Thomas (Maxwell Jenkins) spend their days peacefully. Cage gives a quiet, sincere performance as a father bonding with two teenagers (teaching Joseph how to drive is a highlight). At night, however, they barricade themselves inside to hide from feral creatures that stalk any living prey…

Arcadian spends a lot of time hiding its monsters from us, and what it's lacking is the payoff for that choice. We glimpse the furry hands and claws of the wolf-like beasts, and when we finally do see them wreak havoc their design is striking – but it feels like a mish-mash of monsters that have come before.

Cage disappointingly disappears for a good chunk of the runtime, but Martell and Jenkins hold the fort until he re-emerges in suitably dramatic fashion at *Arcadian*'s climax. Sadly, little else at the finale works so well, with ropey special effects and ludicrous set-pieces ruining the intrigue created at the start. **LAUREN MILES**

THE VERDICT The post-apocalyptic worldbuilding draws us in, but this creature feature squanders its early promise.

PROBLEMISTA 15

Art attack...

★★★☆☆ **OUT 8 JULY** DIGITAL

I'm the thorns that protect the rose,' insists gentle Alejandro (Julio Torres), shielding his monstrously rude critic boss Elizabeth (a roaring, magenta-haired Tilda Swinton) from the New York art world's naked hatred. In this whimsical absurdist comedy, wannabe toy designer Alejandro will be sent back to El Salvador if he can't urgently earn visa sponsorship by arranging an art show of the weird egg paintings made by Elizabeth's cryogenically frozen husband Bobby.

Writer-director-actor Torres whips up a head-spinning combo of deadpan art-world parody and poignant immigration satire, as the naive Alejandro negotiates sex-worker cleaning jobs, scary sublets and Elizabeth's tantrums, trying to stay one jump ahead of deportation. Infusing the chilly New York reality with lo-fi fantasy sequences enables Torres to show off his wayward imagination: Craigslist job adverts issue from a hissing spider web; Elizabeth's rage is a cave-dwelling dragon; and an immigration application forms Escher-like stacks of boxy offices.

Torres' cute comic segments, however, can't find a smooth way to land the story, since he's forever cramming in capricious detours. What if Cabbage Patch dolls used smartphones to troll one another? How would a cryo-defrosted future work? And after the umpteenth iPhone-poking, insult-yelling interlude, the film proves that there can, almost unthinkably, be just Too Much Tilda. **KATE STABLES**

THE VERDICT Torres' charming but chaotic immigration-battle comedy turns New York into an offbeat world of whimsy.

New York City, daytime... and not an Uber in sight

VERTIGO, UNIVERSAL, TRINITY CINEASIA, DAZZLER MEDIA, YORKE DANCE PROJECT, NETFLIX, PICTUREHOUSE ENTERTAINMENT

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DEEP SEA PG

★★★☆☆ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

Following a lonely girl's adventures aboard a floating restaurant filled with fantastical creatures, *Deep Sea* resembles *Spirited Away*, *James and the Giant Peach* and *Life of Pi* in its story. In execution, director Tian Xiaopeng's (*Monkey King: Hero Is Back*) film is a dazzling showcase for CG animation; the gorgeous blend of 3D models and Chinese ink-painting designs fully justify a big-screen viewing. Yet at times, there's almost too much visual chaos to absorb: while the rug-pull emotional denouement stuns, some of the middle act borders on exhausting.

JOSH SLATER-WILLIAMS

INSPECTOR SUN AND THE CURSE OF THE BLACK WIDOW PG

★★★☆☆ **OUT 21 JUNE** CINEMAS

Set in 1934, this CGI animated noir adventure imagines a bug's life as an Agatha Christie-esque mystery. Taking a much-needed holiday after being fired from a case, Inspector Sun (voiced by Ronny Chieng) – a spider, by the way – boards a Shanghai-to-San Francisco seaplane, where a murder most foul requires his detective skills. Colourful and inventive, the film makes good use of its anthropomorphic characters and authentic period setting. Twists in the tale will keep adults guessing, although it might go over younger viewers' heads. **JOEL HARLEY**

DANCE REVOLUTIONARIES PG

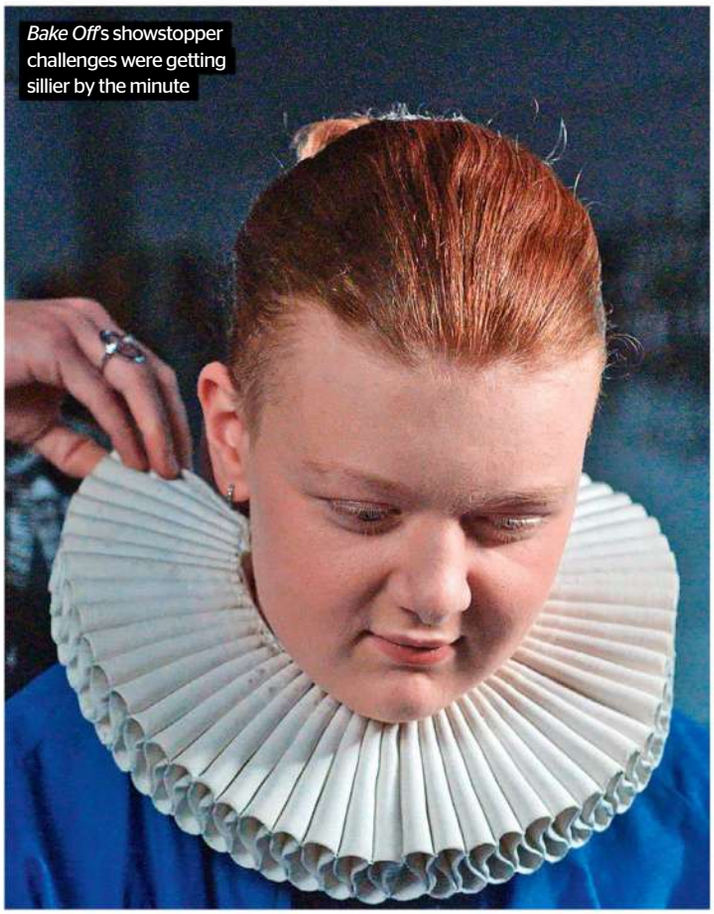
★★★☆☆ **OUT 26 JUNE** CINEMAS

Documentary-maker David Stewart and the Yorke Dance Project pay tribute to visionary choreographers Robert Cohan and Kenneth MacMillan in this 74-minute double-bill. Exploring themes of grief and revenge, the second part adapts MacMillan's 1988 *Hamlet*-inspired ballet *Sea of Troubles* into filmic form, albeit not entirely successfully – Stewart's camera proves rather less nimble than his performers. But the five solo dances of *Portraits* are intimate and starkly captivating, pairing expressionist movement with empty space to haunting effect. **CHRIS SCHILLING**

THE IMAGINARY PG

★★★★☆ **OUT 5 JULY** NETFLIX

Seven years after *Mary and the Witch's Flower*, Japanese animators Studio Ponoc's return is 2024's best imaginary-pal movie so far. Like *IF*, the focus is a sorrowful girl, Amanda (Rio Suzuki), who becomes separated from her 'Imaginary' Rudger (Kokoro Terada) by evil Mr. Bunting (Issey Ogata). As they try to reunite, the plot logic cartwheels, sometimes awkwardly. But director Yoshiyuki Momose keeps the pacing spry, the hand-drawn images lush and the emotional stakes clear. There's a deft balance of rainy-day melancholy with magic and menace: Bunting's ghostly assistant is essentially J-horror for kids. **KEVIN HARLEY**



Bake Off's showstopper challenges were getting sillier by the minute

ORLANDO, MY POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY 12A

Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf?

★★★★☆ **OUT 5 JULY** CINEMAS

Stand down, Bloom fans: this experimental French-language doc is in fact inspired by Virginia Woolf's novel *Orlando: A Biography*, memorably adapted by Sally Potter in 1992. Telling of an Elizabethan nobleman who lives 300 years, never ages and becomes a woman halfway through the story, it's a feminist classic that's now viewed as a formative paean to gender fluidity. 'Someone once asked me, "Why don't you write your biography?"' says director Paul B. Preciado at the start of this playful exploration of its themes and legacy. 'I replied: "Because Virginia Woolf wrote my biography in 1928."'

Preciado doesn't care for Potter's film, believing it to be 'anchored in a culture of transvestism' from which he felt excluded. His highly original response is to enlist two dozen trans and non-binary individuals like himself to act out scenes from Woolf's text and relate them to their own lives: a provocative combo of fiction and reality that makes the tale come alive anew.

Taking turns to don a neck-hugging ruff, these 'new Orlandos' transpose Woolf's hero/heroine into a world where the battle for trans rights is ongoing and where anti-trans sentiments are gathering steam. Crucially, though, they have a ball doing it, not least in an exuberant musical interlude that sees a doctor's waiting room transformed into a neon-lit 90s nightclub. **NEIL SMITH**

THE VERDICT A triumphant declaration against discrimination that's creative, bold and unorthodox.

'After traversing the galaxy, this should be a doddle...'

YOUNG WOMAN AND THE SEA PG

Daisy of glory...

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

Cinema's recent roster of female long-distance swimming stories, such as *Nyad* and *Vindication Swim*, gets a medal-worthy entrant in this handsomely-produced biopic of Trudy Ederle, the first woman to swim the English Channel, in 1926.

Very much a 'Girls Can Do Anything!' movie, it plunges slight and sickly New Yorker Trudy (a determined Daisy Ridley) into conflict with her stern German immigrant father (Kim Bodnia) as she pursues forbidden swimming lessons and enters 'indecent' trial competitions. Soon, she's neck-deep in local records and trophies. Director Joachim Rønning (*Pirates of the Caribbean: Salazar's Revenge*) gives the script a glossy, period-perfect New York setting, full of post-World War One patriarchal attitudes that Trudy fights as tenaciously as the waves.

Ridley brings the engaging pluck and vulnerability of Star Wars' Rey to Trudy, struggling with the family pressure to be a married shopgirl rather than a life-risking Channel swimmer. It's all a tad Disneyfied, yet the film finds fun in Trudy's bet that she can swim from NY to New Jersey, and in her defiance of US Olympic blowhards and woman-hating coach Wolffe (a villainous Christopher Eccleston).

It all adds up to an affecting, *Seabiscuit*-style underdog tale, which will have you cheering Trudy past 10ft waves, jellyfish and obstructive men. That salty liquid on your face isn't sea water – it's tears. **KATE STABLES**

THE VERDICT Daisy pulls it off with style in this wholesome but grabbily enjoyable old-school Channel-swim biopic.

TWILIGHT OF THE WARRIORS: WALLED IN 15

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

Having languished in development hell, Soi Cheang's technically impressive, if narratively underwhelming, ass-kicker finally reached Cannes last month. Budgeted at $40m, it's one of the most expensive Hong Kong films ever made and it shows as Lok (Raymond Lam), a refugee in 80s HK, double-crosses triads and hides out in the mean streets of Kowloon Walled City, where he tangles with a criminal overlord (Louis Koo). Plot twists may be obvious but the frenzied fights are inventive and bruisingly balletic. **JANE CROWTHER**

MY NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON 12A

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

Perhaps best known to film fans as the place where Daniel Craig's Bond meets Ben Whishaw's Q, the National Gallery in London means something to millions. This contemplative documentary sees a range of voices, from visitors and employees to famous talking heads, muse on why it speaks to them, and then choose a favourite painting from its massive collection. Michael Palin inadvertently recalls *Skyfall* by picking a Turner, while Claudia Winkleman peers lovingly at a da Vinci from beneath her fulsome fringe. Strictly for art lovers only. **NEIL SMITH**

ATLAS 12

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** NETFLIX

Jennifer Lopez makes a foray into sci-fi action as Atlas Shepherd, a data analyst on an off-world mission to capture the world's first AI terrorist (Simu Liu). When things go awry, she must learn to trust her AI mech suit. Director Brad Peyton (*San Andreas*) flaunts his James Cameron influences on the film's giant metal sleeve, while Lopez finds emotion amid the weapons-grade pyrotechnics. But the impressive effects and solid (if minimal) world-building barely mask the thin plot and hammy characters: like AI, *Atlas* isn't that clever beneath the surface. **MATT LOOKER**

THE BOY IN THE WOODS 12

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** DIGITAL

Richard Armitage takes a break from Harlan Coben adaptations to take a supporting role in this World War Two tear-jerker. Based on a true story, it tells of Jewish boy Max (Jett Klyne), who survives Nazi persecution by hiding out in the forests of Eastern Poland. Maxwell Smart's ordeal formed part of director Rebecca Snow's 2019 documentary *Cheating Hitler: Surviving the Holocaust* and is indeed a stirring example of resourceful resilience. Beyond Armitage's turn as a guilt-ridden farmer, however, it's hard to see what's gained from replaying it as drama. **NEIL SMITH**

DISNEY, TRINITY CINEASIA, SEVENTH ART, NETFLIX, 101 FILMS

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THE CONVERSATION 12A/12

Tape crusader...

1974 ★★★★★ **OUT 5 JULY** CINEMAS **15 JULY** 4K UHD, DIGITAL
EXTRAS ★★★★★ Commentaries, Featurettes, Interviews, Short, Posters, Soundtrack, Booklet

It's not paranoia if they really are out to get you

Newly restored for its 50th anniversary, Francis Ford Coppola's 1974 Palme d'Or winner – made between the first two *Godfathers* – reveals a writer-director at the height of his powers. Inspired by Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-Up* (1966), and infused with Watergate paranoia – although it was written long before the scandal itself – it's a chilly character study/thriller centring on obsessive surveillance expert Harry Caul (a career-best Gene Hackman).

When he's hired to catch a cheating spouse, Caul stumbles on something much more sinister, but where does the conspiracy start and his traumatised catastrophising begin? The pivotal sequence is a complex street scene which Caul replays over and over, like a lonely filmmaker who can't bring themselves to leave the cutting room – a feeling Coppola must have known only too well.

The accumulation of incriminating details is well served by Walter Murch's sound design and Richard Chew's precise editing, and the supporting cast includes John Cazale, Teri Garr and Robert Duvall, plus a fresh-faced Harrison Ford. If you can't catch it in the cinema, there's also a two-disc 4K UHD collector's edition Blu-ray available, packed with extras such as commentaries, interviews, screen tests and, in a neat touch, a cassette tape of David Shire's haunting score. **MATT GLASBY**

A little more *Conversation*...

THE VERDICT One of Coppola's best - and most intimate - films gets the treatment it deserves.

We don't have to tell you things are bad...

PARK CIRCUS/ARROW, STUDIOCANAL

NETWORK 15

Hacked off...

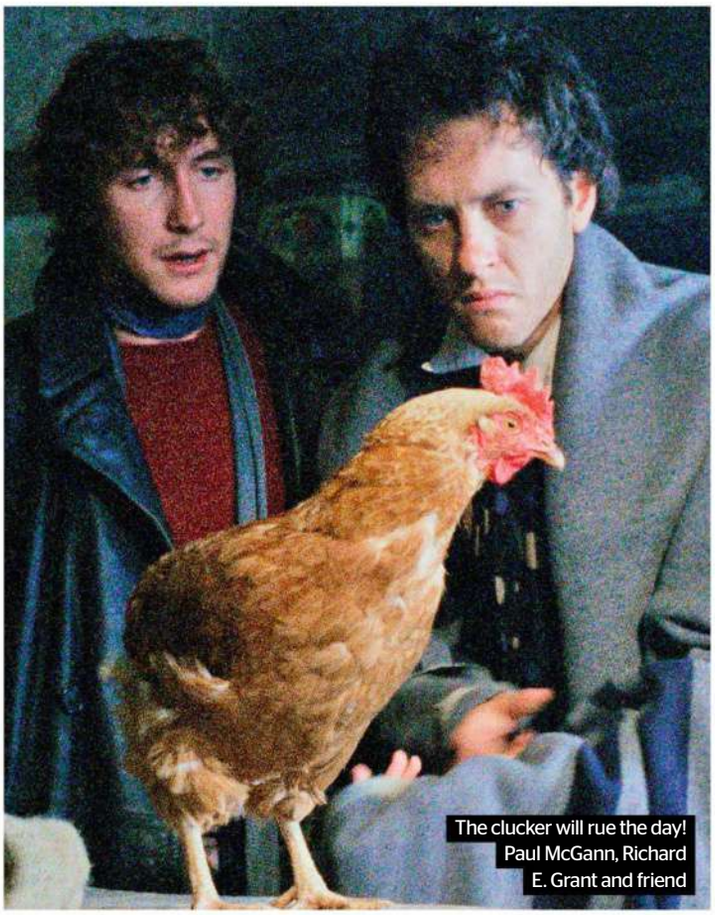
1976 ★★★★★ **OUT 28 JUNE** CINEMAS

Some films get more relevant with each passing year. Nigh-on 50 years old, Sidney Lumet's merciless stab at the media hasn't lost any of its savage edge. At its black heart is Peter Finch's masterful turn as Howard Beale, the anchorman for *UBS Evening News* who announces his suicidal intentions on air when he learns his show is about to be axed. As the ratings soar with the help of TV producer Diana Christensen (Faye Dunaway), Beale saves his job and becomes the 'mad prophet of the airwaves', audiences lapping up his populist rants.

Scripted by playwright Paddy Chayefsky (who won an Oscar for his troubles, one of four the film claimed), *Network*'s hook is Beale spiralling out of control as executives spy a chance to exploit his mental decline for a boost in profits. Made in 1976, it's a film that comes before the creation of the 24-hour news cycle, reality television, fake news and clickbait culture. But with his lament for the decline in journalistic integrity, it feels like Chayefsky had his crystal ball perfectly polished.

Bolstered by gilt-edged support (Robert Duvall, William Holden) casting, and lean storytelling from Lumet, the film's final-act swerve into a twisted terrorist subplot still chills. To borrow from Beale, it'll leave you mad as hell. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

THE VERDICT Still as stinging and prophetic as ever, Lumet's razor-edged tale remains one of Hollywood's greatest media satires.



The clucker will rue the day! Paul McGann, Richard E. Grant and friend

WITHNAIL & I 15

Acting up...

1987 ★★★★★ **OUT 24 JUNE** 4K UHD
EXTRAS ★★★★☆ Commentaries, Documentaries, Interviews, Booklet

'I hate jokes,' is not the sort of utterance you'd necessarily expect to hear from the brains behind a film often hailed as one of the best British comedies of all time. But, despite the best efforts of a cult following seemingly committed to reducing the film to a drinking game and a series of barbed quotations, *Withnail & I* has never been your typical genre piece.

Set at the arse-end of the 1960s, writer-director Bruce Robinson's alcohol-fuelled snapshot of a decade in terminal decline follows two resting actors – Richard E. Grant's Withnail and Paul McGann's Marwood – as they escape the bohemian decay of their Camden Town flat for a weekend away in a country cottage owned by Withnail's eccentric Uncle Monty (Richard Griffiths). What follows is extremely funny, but also deeply poignant: a tragicomic exploration of a friendship that, like the decade it inhabits, has burnt down to its embers.

In addition to porting over the extras from its 2015 Blu-ray release, this authentically squalid 4K upgrade also features a 2006 interview with Robinson discussing his strained relationship with HandMade Films ('One of the reasons I don't really like having a lot to do with [*Withnail & I*] is because I'm so angry with the people who own it').

ANTON VAN BEEK

THE VERDICT Reacquaint yourself with a melancholy masterpiece that is ageing like the finest wines available to humanity and is far more than just a collection of witty quotes.

THE LAWNMOWER MAN COLLECTION 15

1992-95 ★★☆☆☆ **OUT NOW** BD
EXTRAS ★★★☆☆
Commentaries, Featurettes, Deleted scenes, Galleries, Storyboard comparison

Subjected to a lawsuit after the filmmakers ignored the Stephen King story its title comes from, this 1992 techno-thriller was forced to remove the master of horror's name from its marketing. Nevertheless, the first *Lawnmower Man* is a charming curiosity, notable for cutting-edge visuals and sweat-drenched performances from Jeff Fahey and Pierce Brosnan. This set collects the theatrical and director's cuts, plus the low-grade 1995 sequel, *Beyond Cyberspace*. **JOEL HARLEY**

THE ITALIAN JOB PG

1969 ★★★★☆ **OUT NOW** 4K UHD
EXTRAS ★★★★☆
Commentaries, Making Of, Deleted scene, Poster, Collectibles

Michael Caine, Mini Coopers and bloody doors being blown off feature in a 4K collectors' edition of Peter Collinson's iconic British comedy caper, restoring the film to vibrant life. Caine is the ex-con aiming to steal a cache of gold bullion in Turin, backed by Noël Coward's imprisoned kingpin. The film's knockabout humour – including Benny Hill's Professor Peach – still stands up, as do the action sequences, right up to the finale in the Alps. All together now: 'This is the self-preservation society...' **JAMES MOTTRAM**

MADMAN 18

1981 ★★★☆☆ **OUT 24 JUNE** 4K UHD
EXTRAS ★★★★★
Commentaries, Intro, Documentary, Featurettes, Gallery, Booklet

Released in 4K with extensive extras, Joe Giannone's cut-price 1981 slasher is one of the most fun *Friday the 13th* rip-offs, as long as you don't mind some cheese with your sleaze. At a camp for gifted children, the counsellors find themselves stalked by Madman Marz (Paul Ehlers), an undead, axe-wielding farmer. *Dawn of the Dead*'s Gaylen Ross makes for a Mary Sue heroine, but the atmospheric locations, cheap-and-cheerful SFX and, er, spirited performances lend plenty of vintage charm. **MATT GLASBY**

HIDDEN CITY 15

1987 ★★★☆☆ **OUT NOW** BD
EXTRAS ★★☆☆☆
Commentary, Archival shorts, Booklet

'I've lived in London my entire life and it still surprises me nearly every day,' says filmmaker Stephen Poliakoff. That idea drives his 1987 feature debut, which sees Charles Dance's apathetic statistician dragged through London's hidden worlds on a *Blow-Up*-esque quest – shot entirely on location – to recover a missing public information film. Even though the story never quite delivers on its tantalising set-up, *Hidden City* still fascinates with its tour of a secret side of London that might otherwise be lost to time. **ANTON VAN BEEK**

101 FILMS, ARROW, BFI, PARAMOUNT, SECOND RUN, SECOND SIGHT, SPIRIT/CRITERION, STUDIOCANAL

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

MERRY-GO-ROUND (KÖRHINTA) 15

1956 ★★★★☆ **OUT NOW** BD

EXTRAS ★★★☆☆

Featurettes, Booklet

Praised by François Truffaut and Lindsay Anderson on its unveiling at Cannes in 1956, this Hungarian melodrama from writer-director Zoltán Fábri thoroughly merits its digital restoration. It relates the love story between country girl Mari (Mari Töröcsik) and Máté (Imre Soós), a peasant member of an agricultural collective. Thanks to its orchestration of camerawork, editing and music, *Merry-Go-Round* conveys the effervescence of youthful romance, offering the possibility of happiness. **TOM DAWSON**

THE SACRAMENT 15

2013 ★★★☆☆ **OUT NOW** BD

EXTRAS ★★★★★

Making Of, Featurettes, Book, Art cards

Long before his feted X trilogy, director Ti West trod less surely with this found-footage faux-doc. Three *Vice* journos investigate a seemingly idyllic 'sober-living community', where one reporter's sister (Amy Seimetz) lives. But is the retreat's 'Father' (Gene Jones) legit? West crafts a tense mystery that dissolves when it embraces – simultaneously – predictable and implausible horror twists, spiked with crude shock tactics. Still, Seimetz impresses and the alarmist diatribes of Jones' skin-crawling cult leader have a Trump-ian ring to them. **KEVIN HARLEY**

ARMY OF SHADOWS 12

1969 ★★★★★ **OUT NOW** BD, DVD

EXTRAS ★★★☆☆

Documentaries

Although adapted from a novel by Joseph Kessel, Jean-Pierre Melville's suspenseful portrait of Resistance operations in Nazi-occupied France draws power and authenticity from the filmmaker's own wartime experiences.
A haunting exploration of the heroism of ordinary people in the face of unbeatable odds, *Army of Shadows* returns to Blu-ray with a striking 4K restoration (although, disappointingly, there's no native UHD release on the cards) and an additional documentary exploring Melville's time with the Free French movement. **ANTON VAN BEEK**

THE SMALL BACK ROOM PG

1949 ★★★☆☆ **OUT NOW**

DVD, BD, DIGITAL

EXTRAS ★★★★☆

Commentary, Documentary, Featurettes

A year after their 1948 classic *The Red Shoes*, Powell and Pressburger toned down the Technicolor for this black-and-white tale of home-front WWII bravery. Based on the 1943 novel by Nigel Balchin, it charts the romance between brooding and troubled bomb-disposal expert David Farrar and his colleague Kathleen Byron. Released in spiffy 4K, it's shot in oppressively noirish tones by Christopher Challis, but doesn't have the magic of the Archers' enduring works. **MATT GLASBY**

The new recipe for Coca-Cola didn't go down well

SLACKER 15

Talking point...

1990 ★★★★☆ **OUT NOW** BD

EXTRAS ★★★★☆ Commentaries, Short, Debut feature, Featurettes, Auditions, Deleted scenes

Richard said "Withdrawal in disgust is not the same as apathy,"' sang REM on 1994's *What's the Frequency, Kenneth?* Richard Linklater's characters said that and more in the *Hit Man* helmer's second feature, a walking-and-talking Sundance splash that foreshadowed his career and 90s indie cinema's forms and fixations.

Included in Criterion's reissue, Linklater's experimental 1988 debut *It's Impossible to Learn to Plow by Reading Books* navigates themes of travel and aimless youth. These motifs recur in *Slacker* as a nameless character (Linklater) grabs a taxi, ever moving. While Linklater's presence suggests a self-aware POV on the world depicted, his on-screen monologue about choices and branching realities also flags up the film's themes.

Coloured by a sense of community and an alt-rock spirit, the 24-hour path *Slacker* plots through Austin majors in digressions. No sooner do we hear one individual's eager spiel than the camera gloms on to another, 'just lollygagging around' as they riff on JFK, aliens, eco-disaster, the Smurfs and more. As a survey of an educated but indecisive generation unfurls, so does a fresh, witty snapshot of a directorial voice forming: even if his characters' futures are uncertain, Linklater was clearly forging distinctly restless routes forwards. Strong extras include three commentaries, dating from Criterion's 2013 US release. **KEVIN HARLEY**

THE VERDICT Loose on top, tight beneath, Linklater's agile, unpredictable breakout movie heralded a maverick talent.

Somewhere over the rainbow indeed...

MVP

LEON BLACK

Curb is oft-regarded by fans as having two eras – before and after Leon Black. After Larry's wife Cheryl (Cheryl Hines) finally tired of his antics, a new foil was needed. Meet charismatic freeloader Leon Black, as played by J.B. Smoove. 'It works for these two characters to be friends, even if it feels like Leon is bogarting his way into Larry's house,' Smoove told *Rolling Stone*. Leon is seen as one of the few characters to always have Larry's back; a good-natured if chaotic presence who revitalised the show's mojo.

CLASSIC TV

CURB YOUR ENTHUSIASM

A pretty, pretty good sitcom...

2000-2024 DVD, BD, DIGITAL, SKY/NOW

After making history with sitcom mega-hit *Seinfeld*, series co-creator Larry David could have sat back and retired on his television fortune. Instead, he went on to do it all over again with *Curb Your Enthusiasm*.

The writer and comedian had already created a heavily-fictionalised version of himself in *Seinfeld*'s George Costanza (played by Jason Alexander) – but with *Curb*, David became master of his own domain, playing Larry David, *Seinfeld* co-creator and agent of chaos. A true self-portrait? Not entirely: 'I'm cranky,' David told *The Guardian*. 'He's not cranky. I'd be much happier if I were more like him.'

Each intricately structured episode sees a delicate web of misunderstandings come crashing down around disaster-prone Larry, culminating in payoffs like the 'beloved aunt' debacle, or the 'pants tent' he suffers while on a cinema date. Such excruciating incidents required the cast to think quickly on their feet. 'The idea was to do this unscripted so that actors could improvise dialogue and it would feel more genuine,' said executive producer Robert Weide of the show's then-unique approach.

Larry's rich social life includes a thick-as-thieves relationship with his manager Jeff (Jeff Garlin); their scheming puts him at odds with Jeff's wife, the formidable Susie (Susie Essman). Meanwhile, the late Richard Lewis was a series-long presence in a colourful friendship group which includes Ted Danson, Vince Vaughn, and Bob Einstein as Marty 'little orphan' Funkhouser. Elsewhere, A-listers such as Ben Stiller, Lin-Manuel Miranda and Michael J. Fox all line up to subvert their public personas as they match wits with Larry.

Lengthier, more ambitious plotlines see Larry star in a revival of *The Producers*, bring back Jerry and the cast of *Seinfeld* for a reunion episode, and stage his own musical. Like its lead character, the show grew sillier and more bizarre in its old age, with a greater preponderance of catchphrases and extreme scenarios. But it also managed to keep upping the stakes, with Larry earning a fatwa on the one hand and on the other a terrific accomplice in J.B. Smoove's scene-stealing Leon Black (see left).

Originally envisioning the show as a one-off special for HBO, David kept coming back to his alter ego for eight seasons from 2000 to 2011, returning for a ninth after a six-year hiatus. Wrapping things up with *Curb*'s 12th season this year, David proved that no lessons had been learned, defiantly sending up *Seinfeld*'s controversial finale and stubbornly getting the last word on the subject. **JOEL HARLEY**

HBO

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EXTRAS

COLLECTIBLES

FUNKO POP! THE PHANTOM MENACE

OUT NOW

If you're one of the folk who's made *Episode I* reportedly the most-streamed Star Wars movie on Disney+, these vinyl figures will have your eyes on stalks like a certain goofy Gungan. Mr. Binks is captured in a dynamic hammer-throwing pose, ready to knock the (bobble)head off the nearest battle droid (also available). We also have dressed-down Padmé in her Tatooine togs and Darth Maul on his mobility scooter, sorry, Bloodfin Speeder. Pity the Jedi scum that tries to nick his parking space. Hover over to funkoeurope.com.

COLLECTIBLE

LEGO THE LORD OF THE RINGS: BARAD-DÛR

OUT NOW

This screen-accurate Lego Icons set has more special features than an extended-edition box set, from the hidden map of Middle-earth to the automated black gate and rotating library ladder. The 5,471-piece monolith also comes with 10 minifigures, including a superbly shifty-looking Gollum, while the crowning Eye of Sauron illuminates (handy for when you're scrabbling about for a missing mace or chunk of lava). Take a hard look at lego.com.

COLLECTIBLE

GHOSTBUSTERS TAROT DECK

OUT NOW

Who you gonna, um, draw? Will it be The Devil (Mr. Stay Puft)? The High Priestess (Zuul)? Or The Fool (who else but Peter Venkman?)? Cannily adapting the staples of tarot to the 'Busters universe, this 78-card deck also comes with a guidebook. Think you'd better call titanbooks.com.

VARIOUS

MARVEL & THE PRINCE'S TRUST COLLECTION

OUT NOW

The three-year partnership between Marvel, Disney and The Prince's Trust has yielded another fine collection of products created by underrepresented young designers. There are items to jazz up your phone (sturdy cases, attachable grips), items to jazz up your person (T-shirts, hoodies, tank tops) and a coffee mug covered in the dates key characters were introduced, like a Wikipedia that gives you a caffeine buzz. Drink it all in at amazon.co.uk. **MATTHEW LEYLAND**

FUNKO, LEGO, TITAN, DISNEY, MARVEL

FRESH SPINS

Imperators and Imperials...

FURIOSA: A MAD MAX SAGA
★★★☆☆

Fury Road composer Tom 'Junkie XL' Holkenborg's follow-up spends more time spinning its wheels than its attack-mode predecessor. The first half stresses slow-build malevolence and mood, low on momentum and melody, with a *Dune*-ly duduk complementing the abrasive electronic atmospherics. *The Stowaway* and *Fata Morgana* add imposing presence and mystery, respectively, before *The Bullet Farm* heralds a clamorous charge to the finish: *Dementus Is Gaining* and *The Darkest of Gods* finally maximise the all-engines roar required.

JOHN WILLIAMS IN TOKYO
★★★★★

Before conductor Seiji Ozawa died this year, he invited John Williams to conduct the Saito Kinen Orchestra in Japan. Featuring a loving tribute to Ozawa, the emotive results amply justify revisiting Williams' biggies. The three marches (*Superman*/*Raiders*/*Imperial*) are romping and spry; the Potter cues conjure charming reserves of agile melody and ceremonial grandeur; and Leia/Yoda's themes have accrued warm feeling with age. With elegiac poise, *Schindler's List* adds inarguable testimony to Williams' judgement and genius.

Jean-Michel Jarre's got nothing on these guys...

CLASSIC SOUNDTRACK
INSIDE OUT

MICHAEL GIACCHINO WALT DISNEY RECORDS/PIXAR

When it comes to scoring films, Michael Giacchino has a question for his directors. 'What is the saddest moment in the story to you?' he'll ask, finding a hotline to a movie's heart. With Pixar's pitch-perfect 2015 emotion picture, he clearly got a good answer: from birth to Bing Bong, Giacchino's score distils and develops the feelings involved with heart-piercing clarity and nuance.

Honouring his policy of 'less is more' when it comes to scoring feelings, the result was a restrained outlier in a year of maximalist scores (*Jupiter Ascending*, *Jurassic World*, *Tomorrowland*) from Giacchino. Listen in closely, though, and it becomes clear how lovingly he translates that 'less' into quietly dazzling intricacies.

Bundle of Joy sets the tender, twinkling foundations, introducing Riley's irresistibly querulous and optimistic piano theme. Meanwhile, the score's ambient atmospherics augur hints of sadness, waiting to rise. *Team Building*'s doleful tuba hits downbeat notes, before the family theme in *Nomanisone Island/National Movers* arrives in flurries of forward momentum, turning whimsy into wonderment.

Throughout, the score maps out the contours of Riley's psyche beautifully. *Free Skating* shimmers like the promise of ice underfoot. *First Day of School* matches her anxious but giddy determination, before *Riled Up*'s embattled march sets notes/tones against one another to reflect Riley's mood swings.

As the film's psychological excavations deepen, so the score evolves. *Memory Lanes* is a buoyant accordion-backed waltz, *The Forgetters* a jazzy frolic. Bing Bong's theme exudes a bursting spirit of carnivalesque innocence that makes its later turn to loss all the sadder. Hints of Hitchcock/Herrmann and even psychological horror emerge between *Goofball No Longer* and the *Tubular Bells*-ish *We Can Still Stop Her*, throwing long shadows on a brightly coloured palette. In between, *Abstract Thought* devolves into a kind of dismantled Hoyt Curtin cluster of skewed sax and woodwinds.

But it's the way Giacchino resolves his mixed emotions that hits hardest. *Tears of Joy* gives the family theme a weepie makeover, before *Joy Turns to Sadness/A Growing Personality* begins with a submergence in melancholia, leaving spaces between piano notes wide enough for your heart to fall through. When Riley's theme emerges from the gaps, it's with a refined awareness that she needs sadness to strengthen her to move onward. Frisky and forlorn, dizzy and desolate, *Inside Out* majors in this kind of emotional articulacy. And should you need a hug afterwards, well, the jazzy upswings in *The Joy of Credits* should hit the spot. **KEVIN HARLEY**

DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON/UNIVERSAL MUSIC. DISNEY. WATERTOWER MUSIC/WARNER BROS.

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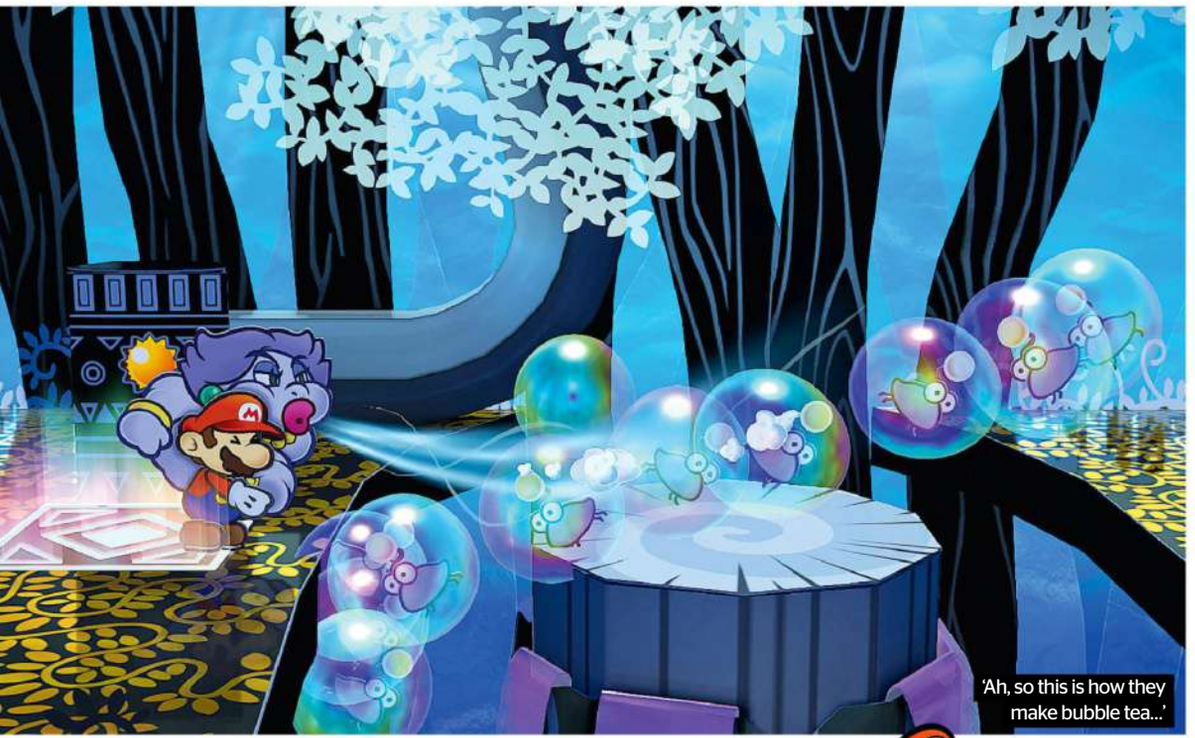


'Ah, so this is how they make bubble tea...'

GAMES

PAPER MARIO: THE THOUSAND-YEAR DOOR

Return of the origami king...

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** SWITCH

This GameCube-era RPG has been attracting calls for a remake or remaster seemingly since the day it came out. As it approaches its 20th anniversary, Nintendo has finally caved in to fan demand – albeit, you suspect, for pragmatic reasons, as it seeks ways to sustain interest in the Switch while preparing to launch its successor. Playing it again now, you can understand the stance of both parties: Nintendo's reluctance to revive the game is precisely the reason its popularity has endured, as this irreverent adventure takes Mario to places we're not accustomed to seeing him.

The seedy town of Rogueport, where the plumber's quest begins, is a case in point: the first thing you see as you walk into the square is a gallows pole, while a side quest has you pulling favours for a mob boss. A buxom opera singer and amorous thief, both tagging along for the ride, make their intentions towards our hero clear: outside the family-friendly confines of the Mushroom Kingdom, it seems Mario is something of a heartthrob. There are a few risqué moments besides, not least when Princess Peach – kidnapped as usual, though not by Bowser this time – is invited to disrobe, her modesty preserved by an invisibility potion. The game's subversive humour extends to the way Mario gains new powers: demonic hexes afford him the ability to fold up into various forms, such as a paper plane or boat, abilities that prove more blessing than curse.

Elsewhere, battles lean into the theatricality of turn-based combat. Each encounter takes place on a stage, with audience participation helping or hindering our heroes, while Shy Guy stagehands add drama, fixing malfunctioning rigs or using dry ice to boost evasiveness. Crowd-pleasing techniques are rewarded with points that power special moves, encouraging you to showboat. These are lent extra flavour by their narrative context, particularly during a chapter which sees Mario entering a wrestling tournament to uncover a conspiracy, each bout demanding a different approach to fulfil the audience's wishes.

There are, perhaps, a few too many trivial battles in which you simply go through the motions. But the updates in this remastered edition are deftly judged: a laborious late-game quest has been sensibly pruned, while the representation of a transgender character is handled with greater sensitivity and tact. With overhauled audiovisuals – the orchestral soundtrack in particular is an unalloyed delight – this is the definitive version of one of Mario's greatest spin-offs. **CHRIS SCHILLING**

NINTENDO, 11 BIT STUDIOS, SFB GAMES

2 MORE

Recent thumb-twiddlers...

INDIKA
★★★★★

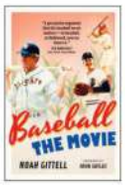
OUT NOW PC
Joining the dots – somehow – between the hollowness of meta-game progression mechanics and the tenets of the Russian Orthodox church, this audacious third-person narrative adventure follows the eponymous nun on a quest for redemption that calls to mind the works of Ingmar Bergman and Lars von Trier. Uneven, but unforgettable.

CROW COUNTRY
★★★★★

OUT NOW PC, PS5, XBOX SERIES X/S
With its lo-fi, low-poly aesthetic, SFB Games' (aka brothers Adam and Tom Vian) unsettling adventure deliberately harks back to early PlayStation survival horrors such as the original *Silent Hill* and *Resident Evil*. Yet it's no mere pastiche, with the Vians weaving a riveting mystery inside their wonderfully realised abandoned-theme-park setting.

2 MORE

From bats to snaps...



BASEBALL: THE MOVIE

★★★☆☆

'Football is war, basketball is a dance, but baseball is cinema.' So writes critic Noah Gittell in this studious treatise on how the movies have portrayed – and occasionally betrayed – America's favourite pastime. Selective rather than exhaustive, the book's sociohistorical approach means that the likes of *The Jackie Robinson Story*, *Bang the Drum Slowly* and *The Sandlot* are explored in detail while others (Sam Raimi's *For Love of the Game*, for example) are left on the bench. **NEIL SMITH**

LIFE THROUGH AN APERTURE: THE FILMS AND PHOTOGRAPHY OF KEITH HAMSHERE

★★★★☆

Keith Hamshere was briefly a child star for screen and stage, but went on to become a prolific and respected stills photographer for massive blockbusters and troubled productions from James Bond and Star Wars to *Ishtar*. His fascinating memoir is charming, detailed in its prose and filled with great snaps. Unsurprisingly, encounters with Stanley Kubrick and Michael Winner provide some of the most entertaining anecdotes. **JOSH SLATER-WILLIAMS**

'Princess Anne, you say?'

BOOKS

AMNESIAC: A MEMOIR

★★★★☆ **NEIL JORDAN** APOLLO

I don't trust memory,' Neil Jordan writes in a fascinating memoir that finds the filmmaker ransacking his own for clues, coincidences and connections. 'What is real is not as important as what is imaginary.' No surprise, then, to find a large proportion of both in a tome that freely jumps from reflections on an Irish childhood and starry Hollywood anecdotes to summaries of films unmade and vivid descriptions of dreams.

You'd expect no less from an auteur whose eclectic career has produced huge hits (*The Crying Game*, *Interview with the Vampire*), ignominious flops (*High Spirits*, *We're No Angels*) and the occasional controversy magnet (*Michael Collins*). Yet as diverse as his credits are, they all seem indicative of an appetite for risky adventure. Where else would he get the nerve to insist he direct his 1982 debut *Angel*? And would he have been able to forge friendships with Stanley Kubrick and John Boorman had they not seen him as a kindred spirit?

A novelist as well as a filmmaker, Jordan has a facility with economic portraiture. Bob Hoskins struck him as an 'emotional Russian doll', for instance, while *The Company of Wolves* was 'menstrual blood in a horror compendium'. Even at 300 pages, however, *Amnesiac* is still guilty of the odd repetition. Do we really require two accounts, for example, of him becoming aroused by Princess Anne? **NEIL SMITH**

DESPERATELY SEEKING SOMETHING

★★★★☆

SUSAN SEIDELMAN
ST. MARTIN'S PRESS

Spurred by a question on her Wikipedia page – 'Whatever happened to Susan Seidelman?' – the director answers in her own words, splitting her story into two acts: the first covering her 60s upbringing, the second her filmmaking debut (1982's *Smithereens*) and subsequent success (Madonna vehicle *Desperately Seeking Susan*, *Sex and the City*). Packed with behind-the-scenes insight, this is a bright, profane and spirited memoir from a fearless talent. **JOEL HARLEY**

DON COPPOLA

★★★★☆

AMAZING AMÉZIANE TITAN COMICS

The second instalment in graphic novelist Amazing Améziane's 'Cineaste Trilogy' purports, like its predecessor *Quentin by Tarantino*, to be the filmmaker in his own words. Thus, here we get an imagined version of Francis Ford Coppola narrating a whistle-stop tour of his career highs and lows. From his formative collaboration with the late Roger Corman to the chaos of *Apocalypse Now*, it's a comprehensive biography, with striking artwork matching the tone of the works discussed. Next up: Scorsese... **JOEL HARLEY**

THE AVENGERS: THE FIRST 60 YEARS

★★★★☆

VARIOUS TITAN COMICS

Where next for the on-screen Avengers? For ideas, dip into Titan's decade-by-decade survey. This highly readable history counts up various departures/debuts to map out the heroes' journeys as a moveable feast. As writers also fluctuated, rifts, romances and returning characters helped spin out the Avengers' shape-shifting continuation. With the New/Young/Ultimate/Uncanny/Forever Avengers all emerging as strong latter entries, Earth's Mightiest appear inexhaustible. **KEVIN HARLEY**

APOLLO, ST. MARTIN'S PRESS, TITAN, TRIUMPH, WARNER BROS.

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CINEMA CELEBRATED AND DEBATED. BOOSTING YOUR MOVIE GENIUS TO SUPERHERO LEVELS...

IS IT BOLLOCKS?

Buff investigates the facts behind outlandish movie plots.

THIS MONTH THE FALL GUY'S CARB CONUNDRUM

Q In *The Fall Guy*, Ryan Gosling's Colt Seavers tells Aaron Taylor-Johnson's Tom Ryder that a lack of carbs has impaired his cognitive function, as the brain runs on glucose. True?

A Caroline Farrell, registered nutritionist, carolinefarrell.com

The claim that 'you need to eat carbs for your cognitive function because your brain runs on glucose' has some truth but isn't an absolute necessity in all circumstances. The brain primarily uses glucose, a type of carbohydrate, as its main energy source. Consuming carbohydrates provides a ready supply of glucose, supporting cognitive functions like memory, attention and learning. However, when your carb intake is low, the body can switch to using ketones, produced from fat, as an alternative energy source. This state, known as ketosis, allows the brain to effectively use ketones for energy. Additionally, the body can produce glucose from non-carbohydrate sources through a process called gluconeogenesis, which ensures that the brain still receives necessary glucose even without dietary carbs. Short-term reductions in carbohydrate intake can therefore sometimes cause temporary decreases in cognitive performance as the body adapts to alternative energy sources. However, this is temporary. A balanced diet that includes a variety of macronutrients – carbohydrates, fats and proteins – generally supports overall health and cognitive function.

VERDICT MOSTLY BOLLOCKS

ALTERNATIVE BOX OFFICE

The biggest movies... STARRING LUPITA NYONG'O

01	**STAR WARS: EPISODE VII – THE FORCE AWAKENS** (2015)	$2.1B
02	**BLACK PANTHER** (2018)	$1.35B
03	**STAR WARS: EPISODE VIII – THE LAST JEDI** (2017)	$1.33B
04	**STAR WARS: EPISODE IX – THE RISE OF SKYWALKER** (2019)	$1.08B
05	**THE JUNGLE BOOK** (2016)	$967.7M
06	**BLACK PANTHER: WAKANDA FOREVER** (2022)	$859.2M
07	**US** (2019)	$256.1M
08	**NON-STOP** (2014)	$222.8M
09	**12 YEARS A SLAVE** (2013)	$187.7M
10	**THE 355** (2022)	$27.8M

ON LOCATION REEL SPOTS BEHIND THE CAMERA

WHAT? Danny Boyle's *Trainspotting* opens with a flashforward to Renton (Ewan McGregor) and Spud (Ewen Bremner) fleeing the cops on a foot chase through Edinburgh.

WHERE? Regent Bridge, Waterloo Place, Edinburgh EH1 3AT

GO? The bridge is the final stop in the chase, but if you want to recreate the whole sequence you'll also need to check out Princes Street, Hanover Street and Calton Road. Watch out for traffic, mind.

ALAMY, DISNEY, UNIVERSAL

Want us to investigate if a movie scenario is bollocks or snapped yourself at a film location? Contact us at totalfilm@futurenet.com

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SUNGLASSES IN MOVIES

SHADY BUSINESS...

1

WITHNAIL & I

A moment of cool amidst a distinctly grim 60s London, as Marwood (Paul McGann) lurches his battered Jaguar into shot, pausing to flip down the lenses on his John Lennon-style shades, before peeling off to Jimi Hendrix twanging the guitar.

2

GET CARTER

It's a power move, removing someone else's glasses. Jack Carter (Michael Caine) lets old acquaintance Eric Paice (Ian Hendry) know who's boss – revealing his eyes, he declares, 'Still the same… piss-holes in the snow,' as he stares into his soul.

3

MEN IN BLACK

The shades are part of MIB's anonymous 'uniform', and when Agent J (Will Smith) cooly dons them, it's hard to disagree with his: 'I make this look good.' But the Ray-Bans also serve a purpose, shielding wearers from the effects of the memory-wiping neuralyzer.

4

THEY LIVE

Wholly integral to the plot, the shades Nada (Roddy Piper) discovers enable the wearer to see subliminal messages in the media that control the population. There's also the bonus feature of revealing which people are actually aliens walking among us in human form.

5

CASINO

In a memorable moment, Scorsese uses Sam Rothstein's (Robert De Niro) sunnies as a framing device. In close-up on glasses so enormous they match the casino boss' ego is a reflected wide shot of a car approaching in the desert for a tense, clandestine meeting.

6

THE MATRIX

A tough choice in a film with so many characters wearing them, but Morpheus' (Laurence Fishburne) nose-clip sunglasses frame the film's defining image: Neo (Keanu Reeves) facing the choice between the wonderland rabbit hole of reality or an artificial world.

7

THE BLUES BROTHERS

'It's dark and we're wearing sunglasses.' With shades as integral to the look as their hats and suits, the Blues Brothers ensure partygoers have a back-up fancy dress option. Jake (John Belushi) only removes his once to charm his jilted bride (Carrie Fisher).

8

THE TERMINATOR

Initially a means to disguise an injured eye, the shades became so associated with Arnie's T-800 that the image is now iconic. *Judgment Day* ensured the character matched the look in the sequel, though the cyborg sadly loses the shades to a punch.

9

BREAKFAST AT TIFFANY'S

From the moment she wore them ambling up to the store window, Audrey Hepburn's distinctive cat-eye Manhattan shades have become synonymous with her look. Combined with long gloves, sharp black dress and 'updo' hair, Holly Golightly is a cinema style icon.

10

TOP GUN

It's right that Aviators' popularity should be tied to the ultimate aviator; sales of the Ray-Ban style increased 40% following the film's release. *Risky Business* demonstrated Tom Cruise looked great in sunglasses. *Top Gun* cemented his specs appeal. **PAUL TANTER**

ALAMY, GETTY, UNIVERSAL PICTURES

Did we miss something? Let us know on @totalfilm

REEL ESTATE

FOR SALE This modernist masterpiece is the perfect home for a multigeneration family. While it's primarily constructed from glass and steel to accentuate those bold lines, cedarwood details on the facade help it to blend into the forest setting of Forks, Washington. Floor-to-ceiling windows offer stunning natural views and keep the place flooded with light, so much so it might even look like your skin's shimmering at times. Beautifully appointed throughout, it's the kind of place you could happily live forever.

HINDSIGHT CORNER

CHRIS HEMSWORTH

THOR: LOVE AND THUNDER (2022)

April 2022

'The amount of improv and craziness got out of hand – in the best way. We had to just keep reining it in, saying, "OK, this is hilarious, but what's it about?"… We had to keep coming back to the love story. That was what was going to anchor these characters, and anchor this story, and ground it.'

April 2024

'I got caught up in the improv and the wackiness, and I became a parody of myself… I didn't stick the landing.'

FLOP CULTURE

POSEIDON

Wolfgang Petersen's 2006 remake had the chance to be a watertight disaster movie. Pity the characters failed to make a splash…

Why it was a good idea (on paper)

Going by *Das Boot* and *The Perfect Storm*, director Wolfgang Petersen had good water legs. With *Troy* also in his tank, he seemed fit to put a starry ensemble cast through their blockbuster paces. *The Day after Tomorrow*'s disaster-movie precedent augured well, too, and the ship's-name one-word title worked fine for *Titanic*…

What went wrong?

Audiences who relished the wave in *The Perfect Storm* didn't have to wait long for *Poseidon* to deliver again. At a taut 98 minutes, the passengers barely registered before Petersen unleashed nature's rage. Perhaps they would have seen more development in the 126-minute original cut. Certainly, Petersen had sturdy leads to help, from old-timers Kurt Russell and Richard Dreyfuss to rising stars like Emmy Rossum. And writer Mark Protosevich recalls being drawn to the 'human dilemmas' of the survivalist situation. But at least the 1972 adaptation of Paul Gallico's source novel *The Poseidon Adventure* emphasised the emotional stakes, however broadly. And at least *The Day after Tomorrow* offset the climate-change message with romance and family reunions. While writing *Poseidon*, Protosevich recalls execs whittling away at his script until it was unrecognisable, leaving 'the skeleton' but not 'the personality'. Seems like the characters drowned along the way.

Redeeming feature

Between the ship's CG dazzle and the sea's elemental roar, *Poseidon* banked a deserved VFX Oscar nom. As with *Das Boot*, Petersen nailed the close-confines action, too.

What happened next?

Squeezed between *Mission: Impossible III* and *The Da Vinci Code* on the US summer release slate, *Poseidon* couldn't gather momentum. Petersen's robust Hollywood run ended here – and he only made one more film, 10 years on.

Should it be remade?

Since Gallico's novel has had three adaptations (see also 2005's TV movie), a relaunch isn't needed. As for disaster movies, here's hoping *Twisters* whips up a box-office storm. **KH**

BUDGET	BOX OFFICE	AWARDS	TF STAR RATING	ROTTEN TOMATOES
$160m	$181.7m	0	★★☆☆☆	33%

ALAMY

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Dome sweet dome: Mel Gibson as Max Rockatansky

IS IT JUST ME OR IS MAD MAX: BEYOND THUNDERDOME UNDERRATED?

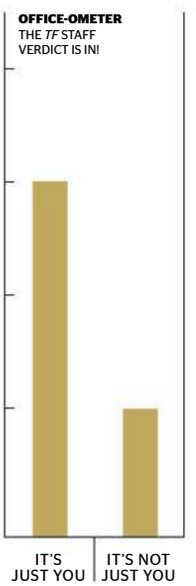
MATT GLASBY
@MATTGLASBY

Though reasonably well-received in 1985, *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome* is generally considered the least-essential entry in George Miller's post-apocalyptic saga. True, the threequel does take a step away from the punky cynicism and bleak violence of its predecessors, but this is a virtue, not a creative misstep.

The tone is more audience-friendly, the humour sillier; Miller was keen to inject proceedings with a sense of slick spectacle fit for the age of MTV and the summer blockbuster. After all, why repeat yourself? At this stage in his career, Miller was becoming increasingly ambitious. He had the itch and the vision to paint on a Hollywood-sized canvas, and he did so with aplomb. *Beyond Thunderdome* is as impressive a franchise reinvention as the (much) later *Fury Road* (2015).

Working with co-director/pal George Ogilvie, Miller has his first, exhilarating go at turning things up to 11. We get wilder costumes, bigger sets, weirder vehicles, stranger characters, a complex, charismatic villain in Tina Turner's Aunty Entity and a thrilling chase climax inspired by Buster Keaton's silent classic *The General*.

And then there's Thunderdome. Could it be that the arena-of-death set-piece is the most original sequence in all 80s action cinema? Big talk, sure, but Max's visceral, visually astonishing gladiatorial battle with Blaster is ripe for a lively Friday-night pub debate. That the term 'Thunderdome' has entered the pop-culture lexicon is further proof of the scene's stature.



Another point to consider in its favour: the hopeful conclusion. Having rescued a group of innocent children from the nefarious Bartertown, our road warrior has found redemption, his humanity fully restored after years of aimless survival. This positive outcome is emotionally rewarding for the Mel Gibson iteration of Max, giving his arc a mythic sense of closure. The buzz may be all about *Furiosa* at the moment, but we need to talk more about how special *Beyond Thunderdome* is. Or is it just me? ***Share your reaction at gamesradar.com/totalfilm or on Facebook and Twitter/X.***

ALAMY, MGM

LAST TIME BOXING MOVIES: BETTER THAN REALITY?

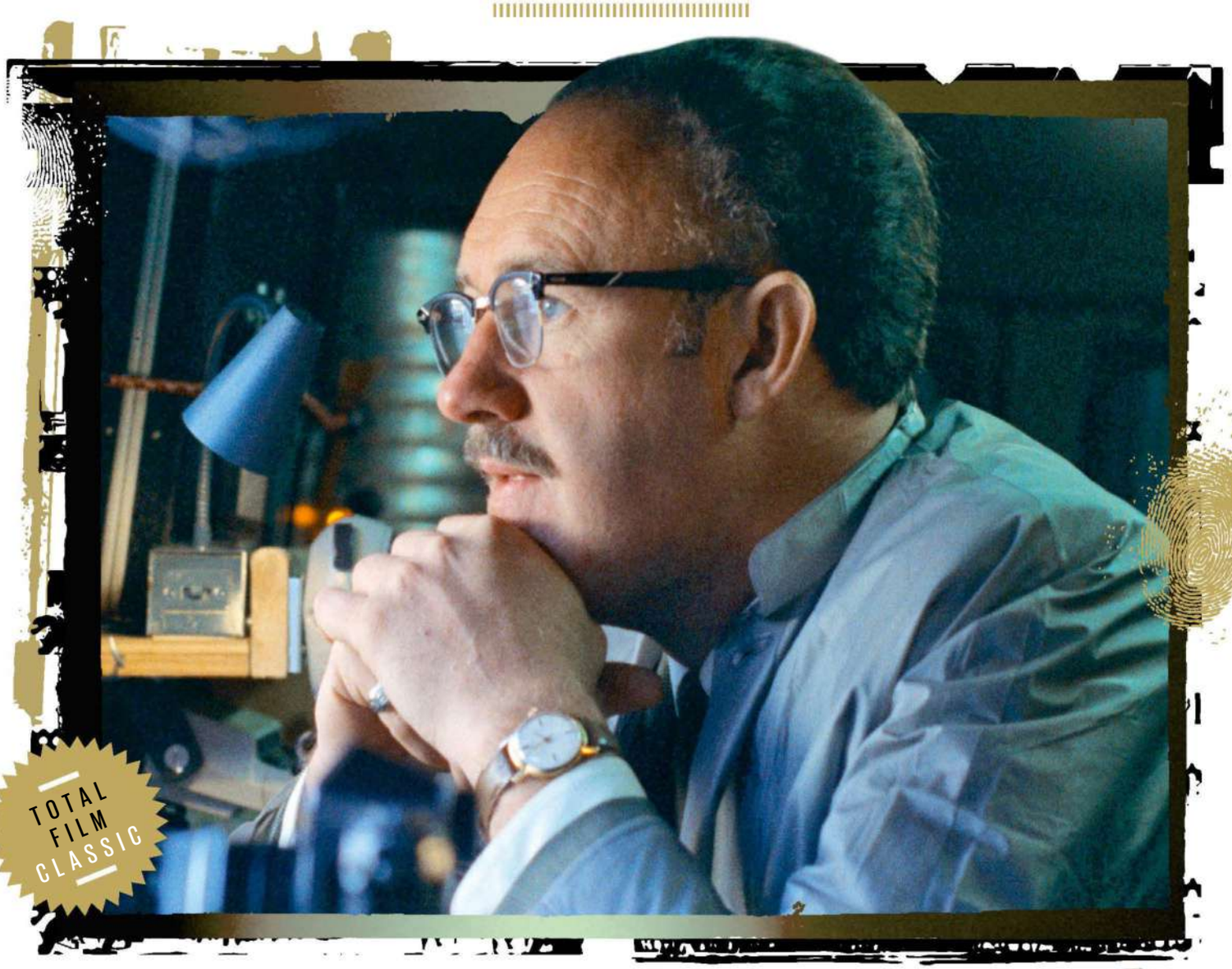
CHEWBACCA_ATE_MY_LUNCH
I've not got any interest in boxing, but Rocky is an iconic character.

JAMIE SPICER
I preferred boxing back when you actually got fights worth watching.

DCBUCTEDDY420
Boxing is boring. It's not the sweet science; it's two morons beating each other and can cause brain damage.

DEGENERATED_
They're never gonna put a boring fight (or low-scoring game) in a film.

CLOCKWORKPICTUREBOOK
Most boxing movies aren't about boxing.



TOTAL FILM CLASSIC

The Conversation

As Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation* turns 50, *Buff* bugs legendary soundman Walter Murch to learn its secrets... **WORDS JAMIE GRAHAM**

Made between *The Godfather* (1972) and *The Godfather Part II* (1974), paranoid thriller *The Conversation* (1974) saw writer-director Francis Ford Coppola work on a more intimate scale to create a measured, muted masterpiece.

Shot in San Francisco, the film monitors surveillance expert Harry Caul (Gene Hackman) as he sets out to record the clandestine conversation of two adulterous lovers (Cindy Williams, Frederic Forrest) for the stinging ears of the woman's powerful husband (Robert Duvall). But Harry breaks his professional code and gets personally involved when he suspects the people on the tape will be murdered.

As important as Coppola to the effectiveness of *The Conversation* was Walter Murch, who received three credits: sound editor, sound montage and supervising editor. It was Murch who recorded and calibrated the film's Oscar-nominated, groundbreaking soundscape, and who assembled the picture, making key structural changes, when Coppola was sucked into shooting *The Godfather Part II*. Fifty years (and three Oscars) on, Murch, 80, recalls recording the film's famous opening.

'The actors had radio microphones in their costumes,' he says of the scene where the murmuring lovers weave through a packed Union Square, their dialogue obscured by live music, honking traffic and criss-crossing conversations. 'The problem was that technology wasn't what it is today. Union Square was a hornets' nest of microwaved transmission. There was no master soundtrack that was not screwed up. So I took the actors to another square in a residential area and I just wandered in front of them with no microwaves.'

When Harry goes to hand in the tape to Martin Stett (Harrison Ford), an assistant of The Director (as Duvall is credited), he grows suspicious, and then uses his particular set of skills to investigate further. But this uncommissioned snooping leads to Harry himself being bugged, or so he believes, and our fiercely private, socially awkward, paranoid anti-hero begins to unravel as the film explores privacy and responsibility,

ALAMY GETTY

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Gene Hackman plays wiretapping expert Caul, with John Cazale as assistant Stan. Left: Harrison Ford as Martin Stett

Teri Garr is Caul's mistress, Amy

Francis Ford Coppola considered this the favourite of his films

surveillance versus participation, and perception versus reality.

When Coppola left for the Godfather sequel, Murch was holding a film missing 35 shots. He reassembled it to make it work without the missing pieces, and would travel to Lake Tahoe to show various cuts to Coppola. The original ending of Harry trailing the female lover through a misty park was moved up and turned into a dream sequence, and one shot was added, of Harry finding his tapes have been stolen.

'Francis called a friend: "You're shooting at Paramount, can we come down and use a corner of your set?"' says Murch. 'So we built a little set of Harry's tape recorder on his work bench, and got Gene Hackman's brother to come in for a shot over his shoulder. Two takes. Meanwhile, the director and star of the film came over. It was Roman Polanski and Jack Nicholson. They were shooting *Chinatown*. We could have panned off of Harry Caul and on to Jake Gittes with his nose in a bandage.'

The key change that Murch oversaw was Harry realising that the missing line of the conversation he's managed to reveal on the tape – the lovers saying, 'He'd kill us if he had the chance' – is actually, 'He'd kill *us* if he had the chance', thus revealing that it's really the lovers who are planning a murder.

'The film is told entirely from Harry's point of view,' points out Murch, 'so how can you get across this information when you can't go out and do some kind of *Midsomer Murders*-type event, where it's explained, 'No, he did this and she did that…'? So in mixing the film, I remembered on the fourth take of that extra recording I did, Fred Forrest said, accidentally, 'He'd kill *us* if he had the chance'. I inserted that reading. It's enough to tip the audience into realising what's going on.'

Released on 7 April 1974, *The Conversation* took only $4.4m (on a budget of $1.6m) at the box office, but won the Palme d'Or at Cannes and received strong reviews. Many critics saw it as a finger-on-pulse political thriller – the Watergate wiretapping scandal that led to Nixon's resignation broke during the shoot – but the overlap was happenstance, and actually (ahem) bugged Coppola, who felt it would give viewers false expectations.

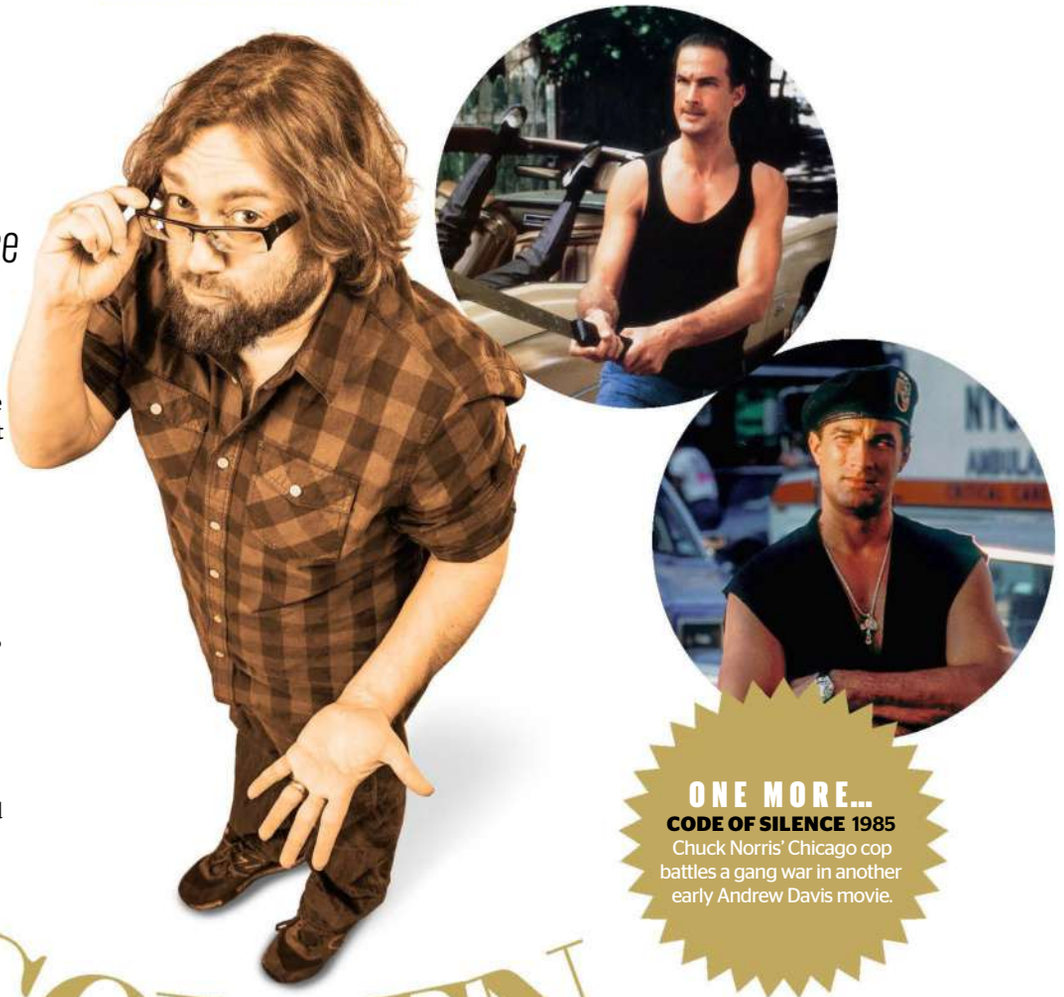
Now, *The Conversation* is considered one of the key films of the New Hollywood movement of the late 60s and 70s, and looks remarkably prescient, its concerns speaking to our current age of mass surveillance and data harvesting. There are those who argue it's Coppola's finest film. In fact, the filmmaker himself names it as his favourite, while Hackman considers it to be the best movie he starred in.

Murch smiles. 'Well, as Abraham Lincoln said, "If this is the kind of thing you like, then this is the kind of thing you like." The people who respond to the meditative pace of *The Conversation* may not be people who respond to the surrealism of *Apocalypse Now*. I'm just happy that it has survived 50 years and it's considered a good film.'

A 4K RESTORATION OF THE CONVERSATION IS BACK IN CINEMAS ON 5 JULY AND IS AVAILABLE ON A SPECIAL 2-DISC 4K UHD COLLECTOR'S EDITION AND ON DIGITAL FROM 15 JULY.

GOLDEN GRAHAMS

Editor-at-Large Jamie Graham unearths underrated classics...



THIS MONTH

Above the Law and *Out for Justice*

Usually in this column, I like to draw attention to obscure movies deserving of the spotlight. But every now and then I feel the urge to go to bat for more widely-known films that are not met with the respect they deserve.

Which brings us to these two early efforts by Steven Seagal… Wait, come back. I know this is a hard sell, what with him having made, almost exclusively, utter tosh since the mid-90s, released two albums entitled, wait for it, *Songs from the Crystal Cave* and *Mojo Priest*, and his being proclaimed, in 1997, a reincarnated lama just a notch down from the Dalai Lama. Worst of all, this sacred vessel of Tibetan Buddhism is now a proud ally of Vladimir Putin. But if you can sweep all that under the carpet and ignore the elephant-sized lump in the centre of the room, then his debut movie *Above the Law* (1988) – also known as *Nico* – and fourth film *Out for Justice* (1991) merit recognition.

In *Above the Law*, Seagal's Chicago cop Nico is operating a drug bust when he's warned off by the FBI, for kingpin Zagon (Henry Silva) is veteran CIA and 'above the law'. But Nico, in the fine tradition of rogue movie cops, is not about to accept such candy-ass orders – especially as he has previous with Zagon. *Out for Justice* sees Seagal play another cop, Gino, who's searching for another drug kingpin, Richie (William Forsythe), with whom he has fractious history. This time, though, he's tearing up Brooklyn.

It's hard to credit now but Hollywood, back in the 80s, before he'd even made a picture, saw Seagal as the heir to Eastwood and Bronson, and the next Schwarzenegger or Stallone. A seventh-dan black belt in aikido, this 6'4" bodyguard/martial-arts instructor was a genuine tough guy who was also magnetic on camera (seriously). 'Relaxed… charming', is how film critic Gene Siskel described his between-fights vibe, while reviewing partner Roger Ebert said, 'He can play tender and smart… He has the stuff.' Heck, Seagal even carries off Gino's beret-and-ponytail combo in *Out for Justice*. Almost.

But what makes these films worth revisiting now is the joy of seeing pre-CGI, unfussily choreographed fight scenes in movies that consider a ballistic bar brawl, a bad guy having his lower leg blown off by a shotgun, or a heavy's head being put through a refrigerator in a grocery store their money shots.

Far less glossy than Sly and Arnie's action movies of the era, *Above the Law* and *Out for Justice* have aged better, shot in blue-collar neighbourhoods where rattling subway trains, roughneck drinking holes and cramped, brown-and-beige apartments in rundown tenements bring an authentic energy.

And just look at the supporting casts: Silva, Pam Grier and Sharon Stone in *Above the Law*; Forsythe, Jerry Orbach and Gina Gershon in *Out for Justice*. The former was also efficiently directed by Andrew Davis, who'd go on to make Seagal's most famous film, *Under Siege*, and the suspense-action classic *The Fugitive* with Harrison Ford. Yep, these films are ripe for rediscovery. As cop Gino tells a tough guy while putting down his gun to fight mano a mano: 'Come and get it.'

JAMIE WILL RETURN NEXT ISSUE… FOR MORE RECOMMENDATIONS, FOLLOW @JAMIE_GRAHAM9 ON X

See these if you liked...

DIRTY HARRY 1971
Clint's no-nonsense cop pursues his own hard-headed line of rough justice in Don Siegel's classic.

MEAN STREETS 1973
Seagal negotiates with Mafia figures running the mean, tatty streets of Brooklyn in *Out for Justice*.

VIOLENT COP 1989
Takeshi Kitano lives up to the title when he finds that his partner is trafficking drugs.

MONKEY MAN 2024
All grit, no gloss, with Dev Patel dishing the pain in a bloody-knuckled revenge movie.

ONE MORE...
CODE OF SILENCE 1985
Chuck Norris' Chicago cop battles a gang war in another early Andrew Davis movie.

ALAMY

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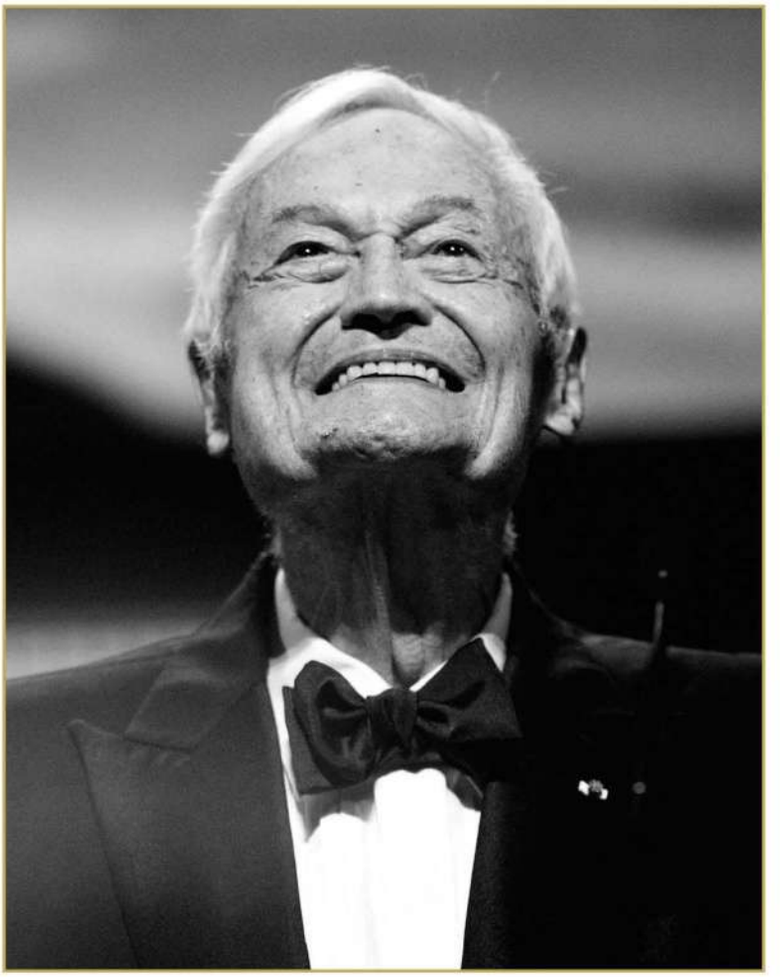
1926 - 2024



ROGER CORMAN

I love the process of making films, and an incidental satisfaction is the fact that most of them made money,' said producer, director and actor Roger Corman, whose 1990 autobiography was entitled *How I Made a Hundred Movies in Hollywood and Never Lost a Dime*.

It was actually 400-plus movies, beginning when he produced atomic-beast flick *Monster from the Ocean Floor* in 1954. Corman was to become the King of the Bs, pumping out movies in the genres of sci-fi (*X: The Man with the X-ray Eyes*, *Voyage to the Prehistoric Planet*), horror (*Attack of the Crab Monsters*, *The Wasp Woman*), crime (*Machine-Gun Kelly*, *The St. Valentine's Day Massacre*, *Bloody Mama*), biker-youth pics (*The Wild Angels*, *The Trip*) and sexploitation (*Night Call Nurses*, *Caged Heat*) throughout the 50s, 60s and 70s. Many were made fast and cheap – man-eating plant horror comedy *The Little Shop of Horrors* (1960) was shot in just two days and one night.

As a director, Corman made more than 50 movies, the highlight being his eight-film Poe Cycle (1960-64), seven of which starred Vincent Price. Shot in widescreen and lush colour, these delirious adaptations of stories by gothic author Edgar Allan Poe revealed a more artistic bent, with *The Fall of the House of Usher* and *The Masque of the Red Death* of particular value. But then Corman was a cultured, articulate man who set up New World Pictures in 1970 to distribute the work of world-cinema masters such as Akira Kurosawa, Ingmar Bergman and Federico Fellini in America. He also made occasional forays into more overtly serious pictures such as *The Intruder* (1962), in which a young William Shatner played a white supremacist spreading bile in a southern town.

Corman will also be remembered for helping to launch the careers of such New Hollywood luminaries as Francis Ford Coppola (*Dementia 13*), Peter Bogdanovich (*Targets*), Martin Scorsese (*Boxcar Bertha*), Jonathan Demme (*Caged Heat*), Robert De Niro (*Bloody Mama*) and Jack Nicholson, who starred in eight of his movies. 'He was my lifeblood,' said Nicholson, while Scorsese released a statement after Corman's death, aged 98. 'He taught me to actually make movies,' said Scorsese. 'I admired Roger, I loved him.' Later beneficiaries of Corman's mentorship included Joe Dante (*Piranha*) and James Cameron (*Battle Beyond the Stars*). Some mentees returned the favour. Of Corman's 30-odd cameos, he boasts roles as a senator in Coppola's *The Godfather Part II* and an FBI director in Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs*.

Corman retired from directing after *Frankenstein Unbound* (1990) but continued producing into his 90s, making interactive horror series *Splatter* for Netflix (2009) and monster movies *Sharktopus* (2010) and *Piranhaconda* (2012) for the Syfy channel.

He is survived by his film-producer wife Julie Corman and four children. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

ALAMY

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FLIXPIX/DISNEY

THE BIG SHOT

MARY POPPINS' UMBRELLA ARRIVAL

The magical image of Mary Poppins descending from the heavens with umbrella aloft has captivated filmgoers ever since Walt Disney's fantasy first appeared in cinemas 60 years ago. According to Julie Andrews, though, it was her stand-in Larri Thomas who did the nanny's actual flying in that iconic long shot. 'She was a wonderful dancer and accomplished stuntwoman and we did look somewhat alike,' Andrews revealed in the second volume of her autobiography. 'Larri became a good friend and was my stand-in later on *The Sound of Music*.'

Yet the future Dame Julie still did plenty of her own wafting as P.L. Travers' childminder, in scenes that tested the crew's ingenuity at every turn. 'Every flying sequence was conjured in at least six different ways so as to distract the audience from how it was achieved,' she'd subsequently explain. 'Sometimes I was suspended on wires; other times I sat on a seesaw or atop a ladder.'

The harnesses, cables and panels needed to fashion the illusion left the then 27-year-old with severely bruised hip bones, for all the sheepskin padding deployed to minimise her torment. On one occasion, however, she almost suffered a much worse fate. 'In one of my last takes I'd been hanging from the rafters for a while, waiting for the tech teams to be ready,' she wrote. 'Suddenly I felt my supporting wires drop by almost a foot.' 'Let her down easy, Joe!' she heard a stagehand yell. 'At which point,' she remembered, 'I fell to the stage like a ton of bricks.' 'Is she down yet?' asked one of the grips. 'You bloody well better believe she is!' said Andrews, mercifully unhurt but still quite shaken by her sudden and bumpy landing. 'I have to admit, I let fly a stream of colourful expletives,' she would later reveal. 'Fortunately I wasn't harmed, because the balanced counterweights did their job and broke my fall.'

A mishap with eyelash glue left the star with a serious eye infection at another point in the shoot, while the pirouettes required for the *Step in Time* number saw her 'strapped to a pole on a lazy Susan and whipped around like a spinning top'. Yet all her feelings of nausea were forgotten by the time *Mary Poppins* had its world premiere on 27 August 1964 at the Chinese Theatre in Hollywood – a spectacular event Andrews remembers being 'glamorous, grand and gaudy all at the same time'. On that day, though, she arrived by limousine… **NEIL SMITH**

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TUOMAS LEHTINEN/GETTY

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DARIO ARGENTO

Giallo maestro...

WRITE START

The son of Italian producer Salvatore Argento and Brazilian photographer Elda Luxardo, Dario Argento seemed destined for a life in the film industry ('Our house was all about cinema,' remembers his sister Floriana). Having worked as a critic as a teenager, Argento turned to scriptwriting in his mid 20s. In the late 60s he worked alongside Bernardo Bertolucci on the story for Sergio Leone's epic spaghetti-western masterpiece, *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968).

THE ITALIAN HITCHCOCK

In 1970 Argento made his directorial debut with *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, a giallo thriller that marked the first in his so-called 'Animal Trilogy'. Slick, stylish and violent, the film was an international smash, drawing comparisons with Hitchcock from some US critics. Despite frequent forays into other horror subgenres, Argento has kept working within (and reinventing) the giallo framework right up to his most recent film, 2022's *Dark Glasses*.

MURDER MOST WOW

Argento's unparalleled ability to conjure up visually audacious murder set-pieces reached its high point with 1977's *Suspiria*, a supernatural nightmare etched in lurid Technicolor hues and set to Goblin's startling prog-rock soundtrack. A (loose) sequel, *Inferno*, followed in 1980, only to be all but abandoned by 20th Century Fox. Belated trilogy-capper *Mother of Tears* (2007) proved a huge disappointment, cementing the downward trajectory of Argento's post-80s career.

BLOOD ON HIS HANDS

Having made a career out of depicting beautiful women being brutally butchered, it's no surprise Argento has been dogged by accusations of misogyny. Less remarked upon, however, are his frequent critiques of traditional modes of masculinity and – for the time – progressive inclusion of gay and transgender characters in his early movies.

FAMILY SPLATTERS

Argento regularly involves family members in his work: father Salvatore and brother Claudio both produced his films; he's killed eldest daughter Fiore and ex-wife Daria Nicolodi on screen; and youngest daughter Asia has appeared in six of her dad's features. 'It's unusual for a father and daughter to make such extreme films,' says Asia, 'but our relationship has grown by the fact that we went into the abyss... and came out the other side without a scratch.' **ANTON VAN BEEK**

KEY MOVIES

THE BIRD WITH THE CRYSTAL PLUMAGE 1970

★★★★☆

The influential thriller that announced Argento as a major new cinematic stylist.

DEEP RED 1975

★★★★★

David Hemmings is the jazz pianist searching for a killer hidden in plain sight in this meticulously constructed whodunnit.

SUSPIRIA 1977

★★★★★

An ancient witch haunts a German dance academy in one of the most beautiful-looking horror films ever made.

TENEBRAE 1982

★★★★☆

Argento addressed critics head-on with this gory slasher doubling as a metatextual exploration of his relationship with his audience.

PARAMOUNT, ARROW, SHUDDER, CULT FILMS

THE *TF* BRAIN

WHICH BIKE RIDER ARE YOU?

DO YOU WIELD A SAMURAI SWORD OR SIX-STRINGED AXE? ARE YOU FLYING PHYSICALLY OR PHARMACEUTICALLY HIGH? FIND OUT BELOW!

START

DOES YOUR BIKE GET 'LIFTED' IN A TELEKINETIC OR A TELL-THE-POLICE SENSE?

PEDAL

DO YOU RELY ON PETROL POWER OR PEDAL POWER?

PETROL

ARE YOU A COMIC-BOOK HERO?

YES

NO

LIGHT-FINGERED BASTARDS!

ACTUALLY, OR IN IP-STEALING NAME ONLY?

LIGHT-FINGERED BFF!

YOUR PLIGHT: TEXTBOOK NEOREALISM OR JOKE-BOOK SILLY-BILLINESS?

WHATEVER, MAAAAN

DO YOU SOLVE CRIMES OR COMMIT CINEMATIC ONES?

KA-POW!

KER-SPLAT!

NEOREALISM

MANIC MAN-CHILD MUGGING FACE

YOU ARE ELLIOTT *(E.T.)*

YOU ARE 'CAPTAIN AMERICA' *(EASY RIDER)*

YOU ARE BLACK WIDOW

YOU ARE PEE-WEE HERMAN

ARE YOU A DC-GRACE OR FROM THE BOWELS OF MARV-HELL?

YOU ARE PRINCE *(PURPLE RAIN)*

YOU ARE ANTONIO *(BICYCLE THIEVES)*

UNHOLY MISFIRE!

HOLY MISFIRE!

YOU ARE JOHNNY *(THE WILD ONE)*

YOU ARE GHOST RIDER

YOU ARE BATGIRL *(BATMAN & ROBIN)*

YOU ARE THE BRIDE *(KILL BILL)*

ROCK GOD

REBEL

REVENGER

YOUR LOOK: 50S REBEL, 80S ROCK GOD OR 70S-HOMAGING 00S REVENGER?

ARROW, WARNER, DISNEY, UNIVERSAL, SONY, GETTY

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NAME THE FRAME

Can you guess these eight scenes featuring cats and dogs?

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

ALAMY

ANSWERS 1. BACK TO THE FUTURE. 2. DON'T BREATHE. 3. GARFIELD. THE MOVIE. 4. JOHN WICK. 5. THE FIFTH ELEMENT. 6. HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN. 7. ALIEN. 8. THE THING

Dialogue

Mail, rants, theories etc.

HAVE YOUR SAY
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★ STAR LETTER

I enjoyed your feature on IMAX cinemas [issue 351], even though years ago I vowed never to set foot in one. It wasn't the visuals that brought me to that conclusion but the sound. I came out of a screening of *Prometheus* feeling like I'd just done 10 rounds with Mike Tyson, my ears ringing and head thumping. Perhaps if Hollywood could release a *quiet* IMAX blockbuster I'd give it another go. But I fear I'm now of an age where I prefer the more intimate setting of my local Everyman cinema.

JOHN NICHOL, EDINBURGH

We'd suggest taking a chance on the upcoming *A Quiet Place: Day One*, but the trailer's sirens, screams and somersaulting cars suggest your ears might be in for another Tyson-ing. Would be nice, though, to see more 'small' or foreign-language films go large (even if scanning subtitles on a super-sized screen can feel like you're at a tennis match). John and everyone with a letter printed here will receive a copy of *Lisa Frankenstein*, out now on 4K UHD, BD and DVD via Mediumrare Entertainment. Didn't send an address? Email it! Or you'll be in pieces!

AS IF!

I rarely disagree with your film reviews, but for the life of me cannot understand the two-star write-up for *IF*. It seems your reviewer and I were watching two different films. I'm nearing 60 and have seen it three times (and loved each viewing). I've highly recommended it to work colleagues and friends and they've loved it, too. I know films are subjective but maybe for children's films the view of the intended audience should also be taken into account. It would be interesting to see what a younger person thought of *IF* – and going forward, when it came to other films of that ilk, they would get to see what stressful jobs their parents/other relatives have.

LEE MURCUTT, BLACKWOOD

TBH, the most stressful part of going to review screenings with little'uns in tow is trying to stop them eating their body weight in popcorn before the film's even started, or when one of the little devils, sorry, darlings squirts Fruit Shoot all over our notepad, rendering our early morning scribblings even more illegible. Sorry to disagree over *IF*; maybe the title had us hanging on for Malcolm McDowell to show up and stage a frenzied public-school revolt (which might have jarred with the whimsical tone, admittedly).

'Let's think up a more positive *Total Film* review as well as some imaginary friends...'

@LeoRimmer69
[Are you excited for *Fast 11*?]
'They should do more drifting. *Tokyo Drift* is one of the best!'

JOB WELL DUNNE

Within a typically entertaining issue [349] was a piece on one of my all-time favourite films, *After Hours*. Between that and *An American Werewolf in London*, I'm incredibly surprised that Griffin Dunne did not become huuuuuge. And, hot take: *After Hours* is Martin Scorsese's most entertaining, if not simply his best film. Fight me!

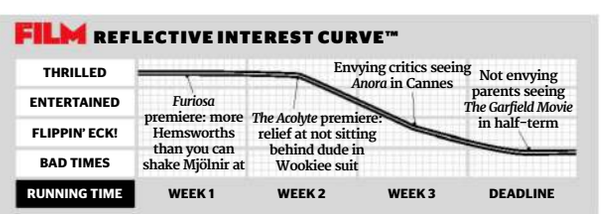
KEN MEYER JR, ANAHEIM

If Mr Dunne is huuuuuge in the hearts of *Total Film* readers, then that's what counts. And as a sincerely peace-loving publication, we would never fight you... However, if others want to step into the ring, we'll happily watch you duke it out LaMotta-style over Marty's back catalogue. Time to stand up and be counted, *Shark Tale* fans!

WHAT YOU MISSED ON THE POD LAST MONTH

Exclusive interviews with Chris Pratt, Daisy Ridley, George Miller, Renny Harlin and more. The greatest movie apes. The characters that deserve their own prequels. Plus reviews and more, every week!

INSIDE TOTAL FILM



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OFFICE SPACED

CHATTER 'GEMS' OVERHEARD IN THE *TOTAL FILM* OFFICE THIS MONTH...

*"What I like about silent films is the soundtracks.'

***'I like [ACTOR REDACTED] but worry he's going to headbutt me through the screen, like a *Football Factory* version of *Ringu*.'**

MUM(BLE)'S THE WORD

My daughter, who is an avid moviegoer, is due to have a baby later this year. My understanding is that the baby is able to sense surrounding sounds by the sixth month of pregnancy. However, the intensity of sound heard by us is not the same as that heard by babies; it gets muffled due to the womb's amniotic fluid. Consequently, I've suggested to my daughter that it would be unfair for the unborn bambino to watch any movies starring Sly Stallone, Tom Hardy or Jeff Bridges, as the poor little sweet pea will have absolutely no chance of following the plot thanks to these now-muted notorious mumblers. Don't want to put the poor kid off cinema for life!

G-DOG DAVEY, CALVERLEY

First off, massive congrats to you and the soon-to-be-bigger fam. Secondly, we see your concerns, but a possible solution could be for your daughter to put the subtitles on and repeat crisply and clearly the muttering thesps' lines. After all, what could be more soothing for an infant to hear than their mum bellowing 'I'm Gotham's reckoning' or 'We are Venom'?

Mutters of great importance: Tom Hardy as Bane

@filmgatereviews

[What's your go-to bank holiday movie?]

'A bank movie is perfect for a bank hol: *Bank of Dave*.'

ALIEN SENSATION

While rewatching my Alien Quadrilogy (surely a made-up word) box set recently, I remembered visiting the proper scary, live-action Alien War experience in London's Trocadero Centre in the early 90s. Actors dressed as marines led you round spooky sets based on James Cameron's *Aliens*. The finale involved being chased by an utterly terrifying xenomorph; you ended up legging it at full pace through an emergency exit and out onto the streets of Piccadilly Circus. Did anyone else go to Alien War all those years ago, and was it really as underwear-fillingly frightening as I recall, or just a bit plop?

PHIL SLOAN, BEXLEY VILLAGE

Well, thanks very much for stirring up our most unsettling memory of the early 90s (aside from Mr. Blobby claiming the Christmas No.1 spot). Yes, the 'total reality' experience put the 'o' and 'de(a)r' in Trocadero until a basement flood sadly closed it down. (Maybe the xenomorphs aren't so scary when you realise they can be defeated by unruly plumbing.)

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Cover image Courtesy of Disney/Marvel Studios

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Total Film (ISSN 1366-3135 USPS 23870) is published monthly with an extra issue in April by Future Publishing, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA, UK. BAR subscription prices are £71.50 for UK, €153 for Europe, $173 for US, £133 for Rest of World. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named World Container Inc., co BBT 150-15 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Periodicals Postage Paid at Brooklyn Brooklyn NY 11256. US POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Total Film*, Air Business Ltd, c/o World Container Inc., 150-15 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Subscription records are maintained at Future Publishing, co Air Business Subscriptions, Rockwood House, Perrymount Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH16 3DH, UK.

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Printed in the UK by William Gibbons & Sons, on behalf of Future
Distributed by Marketforce UK, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London W2 6JR mfcommunications@futurenet.com

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ISSN Total Film 1366-3135

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6,693 Digital

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SPOILER ALERT!

60 SECOND SCREENPLAY

TF SAVES YOU THE COST OF A MOVIE EVERY MONTH. THIS ISSUE: THE FIRST OMEN

WORDS MATT LOOKER

FADE IN:

INT. CHURCH
FATHER CHARLES DANCE shows FATHER RALPH INESON a picture of a baby and warns him of an ungodly conspiracy in the church. Then a metal pole falls and gruesomely kills him.

FATHER RALPH INESON
Yikes! I hope nothing exactly like that happens to me approximately five years from now.

INT. ORPHANAGE, ROME
American novitiate NELL TIGER FREE arrives at the orphanage where she is greeted by FATHER BILL NIGHY. Her tour of the building includes a complimentary face-licking from troubled girl NICOLE SORACE.

MARIA CABALLERO
Hi, Nell, I'm your new flatmate! I am also taking the veil, but I'm more sexually liberated than you so I can provide a contrast to your deep-seated Catholic guilt.

NELL TIGER FREE
OK. By the way, I used to have visions when I was a child that I thought were real. But I'm sure it won't be a problem.

INT. CLUB
MARIA CABALLERO and NELL TIGER FREE are on it. NELL licks a guy's face before blacking out with no memory of what happens next.

NELL TIGER FREE
Ugh, I have a hangover. My hair is messy and I feel gross. This is the worst thing that's ever happened to anybody.

She sees a pregnant woman get restrained before graphically giving birth to a horrible demon hand. Then a nun sets herself on fire and hangs herself.

NELL TIGER FREE
Oh no! Maybe I should pray for a bit and see if that helps.

EXT. PARK
NELL TIGER FREE meets up with FATHER RALPH INESON at a bench.

FATHER RALPH INESON
A cult exists within the church. They are planning to use Nicole Sorace to give birth to the Antichrist. Congregation attendance is low and they think this will drive people back to church.

NELL TIGER FREE
Well, that sounds like a foolproof plan with no downside.

She bumps into the guy she met at the club, who now seems terrified of something. Before he can explain, a car crashes into him, cutting his body literally in half.

NELL TIGER FREE
Oh no! Maybe I should pray for a bit and see if that helps?

INT. OFFICE
NELL TIGER FREE finds secret files about disfigured babies all bearing a '666' birthmark, including an entry on NICOLE SORACE.

NELL TIGER FREE
Hey, look – I have a '666' birthmark, too! Oh wait, now I remember. That night at the club, I was impregnated by the Devil! Nicole isn't going to be the Antichrist's mum, I am!

She immediately develops a full pregnant belly and is captured by FATHER BILL NIGHY, who forces her to give birth to twins – a girl and a boy. She stabs him and tries to run away.

MARIA CABALLERO
Stop! Now that I have taken the veil, I am also part of this extreme conspiracy somehow. I'll take the boy and burn this whole place down.

She does, but then NICOLE SORACE saves NELL TIGER FREE and they escape. Meanwhile, the conspiracists take the baby boy to the dad from the original movie, who lies to his wife about their son's origins.

MARIA CABALLERO
There. Everything should now neatly match up with the actual first Omen. Well, apart from the secret sister who has never been mentioned and completely changes the canon.

INT: MOUNTAIN CABIN, YEARS LATER
NELL TIGER FREE lives in hiding with her daughter and NICOLE SORACE, but FATHER RALPH INESON easily finds them.

FATHER RALPH INESON
They know you're alive and they're coming for you and your daughter, possibly setting up a sequel if this film does well at the box office.

NELL TIGER FREE
Oh no! Maybe I should pray for a bit and see if that helps?

FIN

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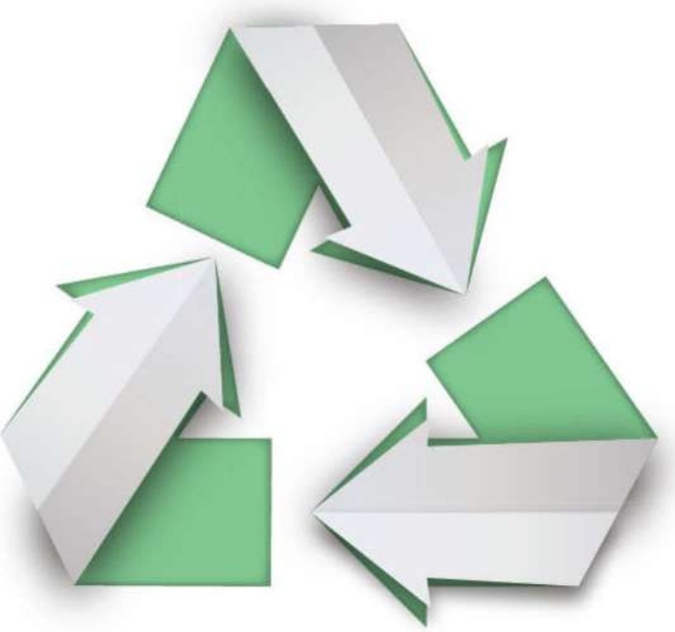

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